

INCLUDING
RETRO
THE UK'S ONLY RETRO GAMES MAGAZINE

HIGHLIGHTS

RIDGE RACER 6
[XB360]

PREY
[PC/XB360]

RADIATA STORIES
[PS2]

NINETY-NINE NIGHTS
[XB360]

BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT
[PS2/XB]

THE WARRIORS
[PS2/XB]

ŌKAMI

Leader of the pack – Capcom revolutionises the gaming palette

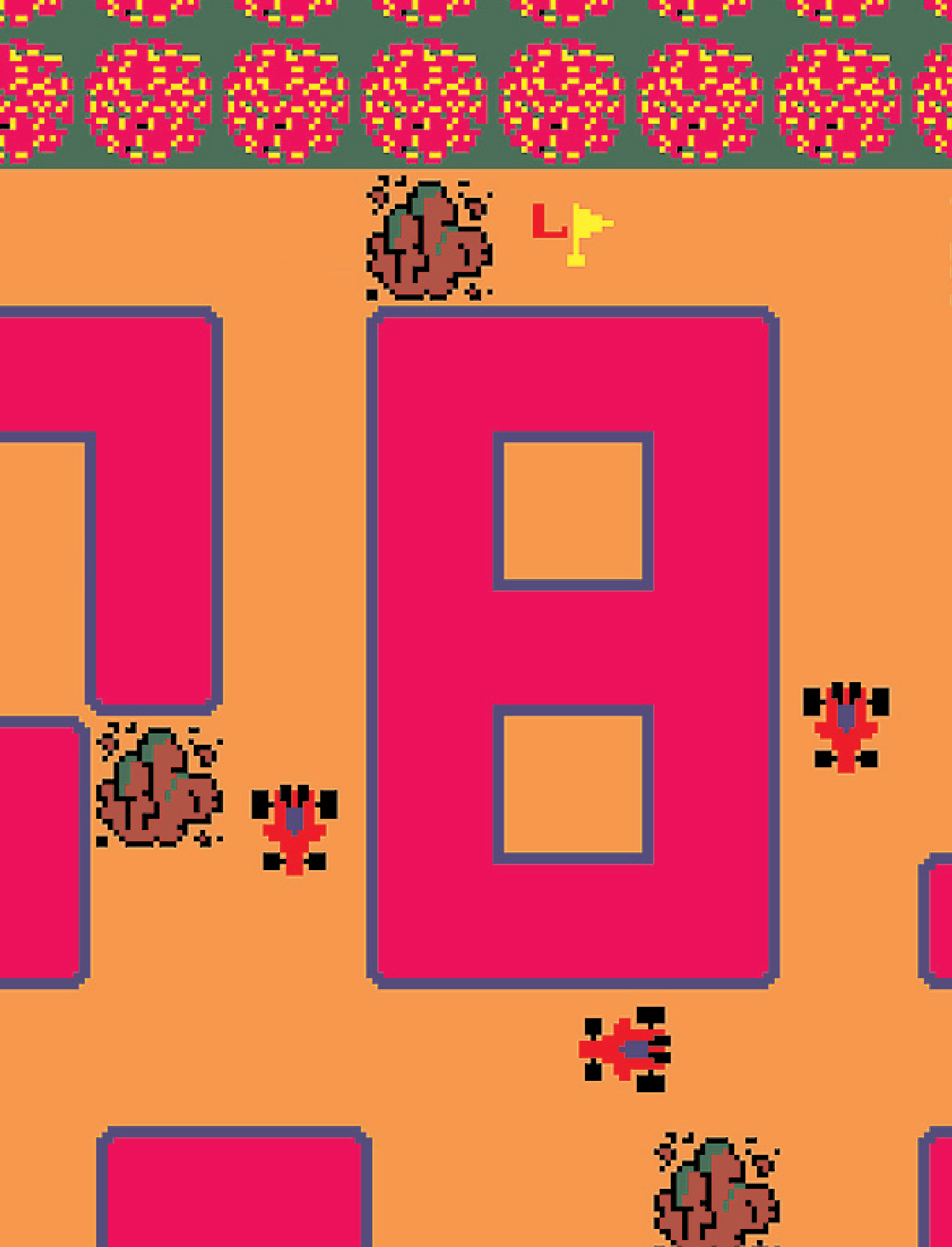

eMag

Maybe we've set our expectations too high. Maybe we've grown so accustomed to big announcements and other massive industry events that even when something important does come along, we just don't find ourselves getting excited. Either way, this year's Tokyo Game Show was, to be frank, something of a disappointment. Yes, it was the first real chance to go hands-on with a plethora of Xbox 360 titles. Yes, we got to play more than a few games that, up until now, have been nothing more than a few screens and hot PR air. And yes, we got to mingle with many, many ladies who can only be described as 'hot'. And yet… well, it just wasn't enough. In fact, only Nintendo's unveiling of the Revolution controller – a device that, despite heavy criticism, we still have high hopes for – and games we've been anticipating for months such as the unbelievable *Okami* got us anywhere near the level of excitement that we'd expected from the event. To say we were surprised is an understatement; with so much hype surrounding the show, we'd hoped for so much more. But then, that seems to be the problem with the majority of gamers today… too much cynicism, not enough fun.
Damn our eyes.

Martin Mathers
Editor







CONTENTS

FEATURES

Play School 76

Forget the blight on the gaming landscape that is 'edutainment' – schools could soon by using real videogames as part of their curriculum. **games™** investigates behind the playground wall…

Community 86

From Age Of Empires to a Titan's Quest, Iron Lore Entertainment is a developer with a real history

The Players – Relic Entertainment 84

Are videogames art? Relic's David Cheong certainly believes that the two mediums can be compared…

The Players – Marvelous 90

Harvest Moon creator Yasuhiro Wada talks farming, animals and the future of the series

Okami 30

The most beautiful videogame ever created – period. We talk to Atsushi Inaba about the game that could revolutionise game visuals forever

Battlefield 2: Modern Combat 94

So, can EA really turn a PC classic into a frantic console blaster? The definitive verdict, right here

Hardware Legend: Commodore 64 142

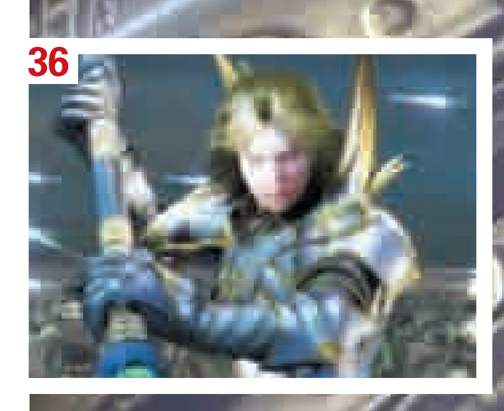
Considered by many to be the true champion of the 8-bit computer era, Retro examines the greatness that was Commodore's classic machine…

REGULARS

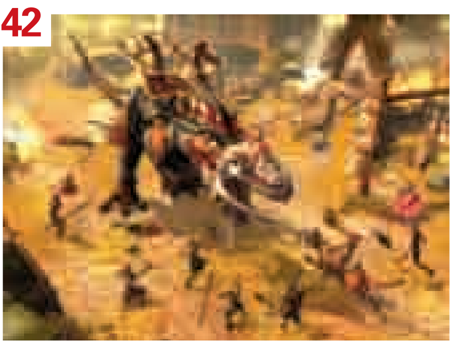
PREVIEWS

REVIEWS

RETRO

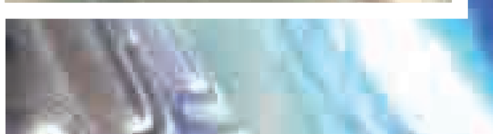

36




42



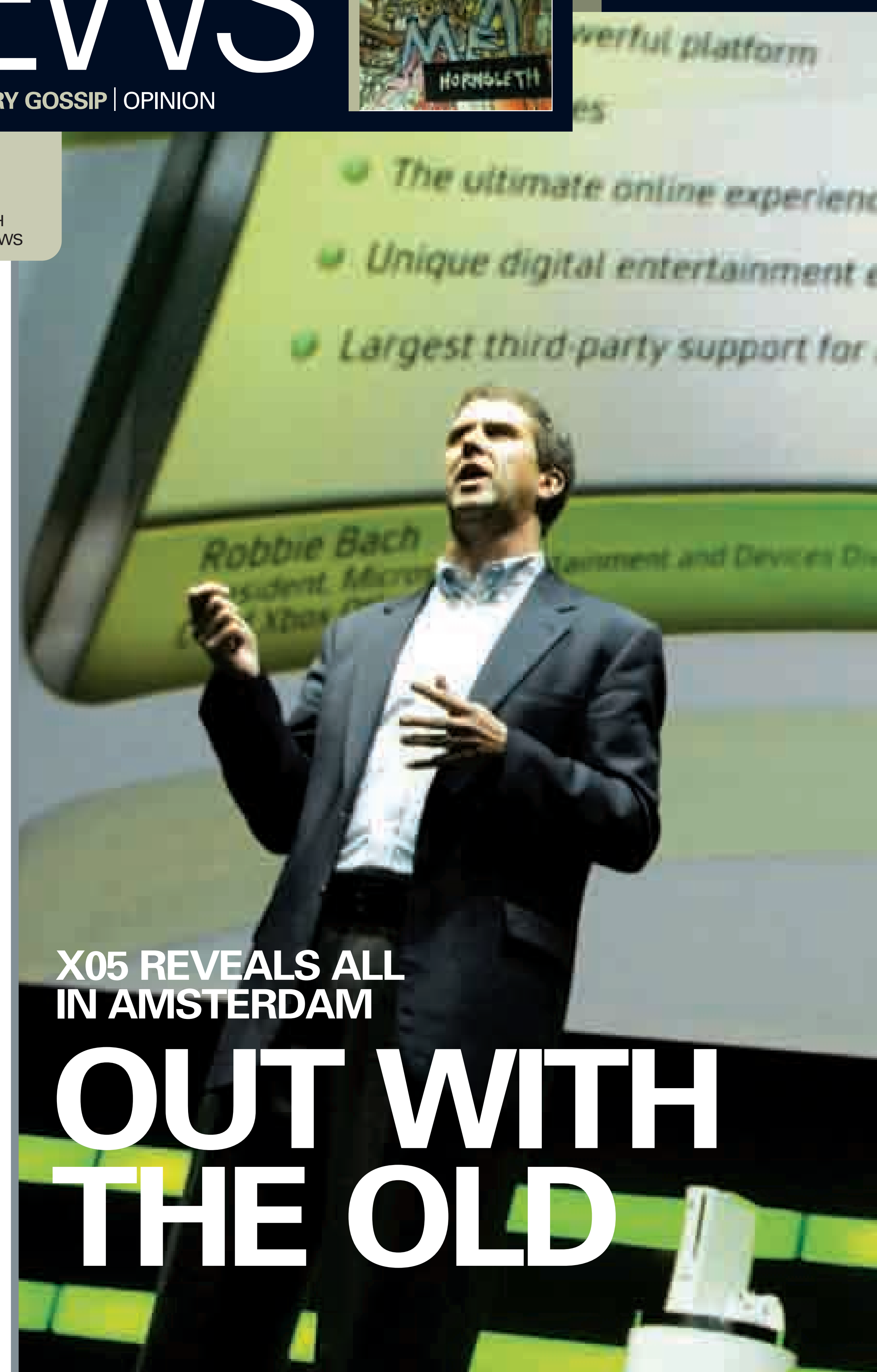

60




94
120
Ten years in development – a sign of a troubled project, or the foundation for a truly great game? If you’re Human Head Studios, it’s the start of an FPS revolution…
66 Prey

NEWS

NEWS | INDUSTRY GOSSIP | OPINION



CONTENTS

FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

X05 REVEALS ALL IN AMSTERDAM

OUT WITH THE OLD

SHOW AND TELL

PLAYABLE CODE WAS OUT IN FORCE AT X05 – HERE ARE OUR IMPRESSIONS OF THE HIGH PROFILE FIRST-PARTY LAUNCH GAMES AT THE EVENT…

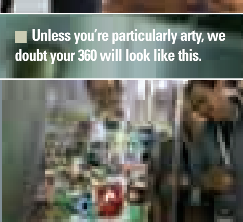
Last month, hundreds of media and industry types descended upon Amsterdam to sample the next generation at Microsoft's X05 event. After a year off, the expo returned to give us some insight into the Xbox 360 and play host to a few important announcements…

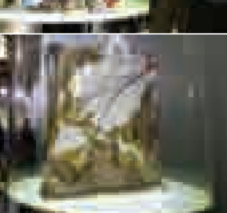
Perhaps the most important news in terms of the launch line-up was the long-expected confirmation that first-party titles *Project Gotham Racing 3, Kameo: Elements Of Power* and *Perfect Dark Zero* would all be appearing alongside the console at its European debut on 2 December. EA also announced five launch titles: *Need For Speed: Most Wanted, FIFA 06: Road To FIFA World Cup* (EA's first ever platform exclusive title), *NBA Live '06, Tiger Woods PGA Tour '06* and *Madden NFL '06*, as well as confirming that three more titles – *Burnout: Revenge, The Godfather* and *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat* – would all be available early in 2006. *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and a newly announced Bioware RPG, *Mass Effect*, got most people at the event excited, while the newest *Splinter Cell* was confirmed as a platform exclusive by Ubisoft and Activision declared the imminent return of its *Castle Wolfenstein* series.

Microsoft then announced a cross-promotional partnership with Adidas, which will see Xbox 360 given prominence in stores and at events, while Adidas will install content on the console. "The alliance between Adidas and Xbox reflects the fact that sports, lifestyle and videogames are inextricably linked," said Microsoft's Peter Moore. While sports and videogames don't strike us as a likely partnership (too much exercise against too little), it's still good news in terms of games' integration in the wider world of brand awareness.

Unfortunately, though, many left the event feeling that it had all been slightly premature. Microsoft's Robbie Bach stated that the console was to ship with the, "best games and launch line-up," ever seen but at the keynote speech, Microsoft was only able to confirm eight titles, meaning that the promised figure of 15-20 launch games looks slightly dubious. Microsoft's David Reid put it down to certification issues after the speech, so hopefully the remaining titles will emerge over the coming weeks. In terms of industry and consumer support, however, the 360's future looks bright – come 2 December, Microsoft can look forward to a much less problematic launch than it had back in 2001.

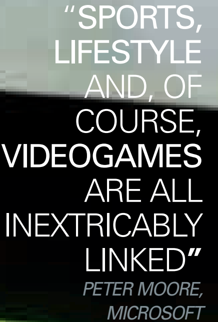
Unless you're particularly arty, we doubt your 360 will look like this.



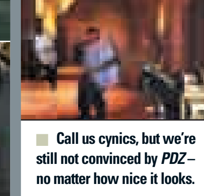




The range of Xbox 360s on show ranged from attractive to just bizarre.



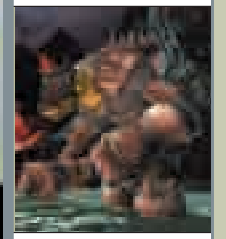
"SPORTS, LIFESTYLE AND, OF COURSE, VIDEOGAMES ARE ALL INEXTRICABLY LINKED"
PETER MOORE, MICROSOFT



Call us cynics, but we're still not convinced by *PDZ* – no matter how nice it looks.



No doubt Bizarre's high definition take on *Project Gotham* will be popular…



Third machine lucky – will Rare finally make good on its promise with *Kameo*?

PERFECT DARK ZERO

The level on show at X05, named 'Rooftops', involved Joanna Dark sniping from rooftops and signposted vantage points in order to protect her father from waves of attackers. Although it displayed some troubling AI issues with guards neglecting to respond to (or occasionally even notice) being shot at, the game has progressed since the E3 build we saw back in May. The way damage is measured by how much armour an enemy loses is worth a mention. True, seeing an entire suit of armour falling off an enemy in a matter of seconds as you empty bullets into it is strange, but the feature is generally effective. It does not, however, have us entirely convinced – the slightly excessive hinting and AI issues at this stage of development left us slightly concerned.

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 3

X05 was the first time *PGR3* had been showcased in playable form for the European press, and the most immediately noteworthy aspect of the game is how absolutely stunning it looks. Racing around Tokyo and London, one can't help but marvel at the game's stunning representations of its featured cities. It also handles significantly differently from *PGR2*, rewarding drivers for skilful driving rather than the sort of ostentatious showboating often necessary to garner Kudos points in the previous game. The handling is less forgiving, too, necessitating more realistic braking, cornering and sticking to the racing line. Easily the most popular game at the conference, *PGR3* cannot fail to visually impress come launch day… but just how different will the gameplay be?

KAMEO: ELEMENTS OF POWER

A game that has divided opinion thus far, the complete build playable at X05 was a talking point, although it seemed to disguise an essential simplicity behind the complex creature-switching element. The four face buttons are used to switch creatures (only the shoulder buttons are devoted to Kameo's actual actions) while the gameplay is a mix of methodical enemy bashing and creature-based puzzles, requiring frequent switching and the occasional moment of consideration before finding the solutions to puzzles. Switching takes getting used to and could run the risk of becoming arbitrary, but the game feels solid and the puzzles we encountered were well thought through.

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



ORIGEN-AL SIN

The over-hyped Origen Xbox 360 countdown at origenxbox360.com has arrived at zero – to reveal an uber-complex, load time-heavy Flash website that offers nothing more than a competition to win a trip to the X360's launch event. Involving hallucinating bunnies and magical fruit, the site appears to have been designed by hormonal art students – and because most people were expecting an announcement of somewhat greater magnitude from the site, all the complex animations and out-there imagery seems all the more redundant.

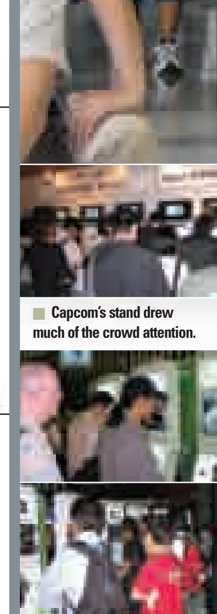




SCOTLAND, THE BRAVE

If you're reading this on or just before the magazine street date (2 November), then you're just in time – the bastard offspring of the internet's favourite gaming show, Consolevania, is about to hit the BBC. Entitled videoGaiden, the ten-minute long show promises all the usual japes from the lads – the only catch is that it's on BBC2 Scotland (meaning you'll need to either live there or have Sky Digital to watch) at just after midnight on 4 November. We can't wait…





Capcom's stand drew much of the crowd attention.

Standing in line – it's every gamer's dream. Really.

Super Monkey Ball on the DS works surprisingly well.

TOKYO A



JAPANESE GAME EVENT DELIVERS ONLY FEW ITEMS OF GENUINE INTEREST

It's supposedly a balancing act for publishers and developers. On one hand, you have the biggest Japanese show of the year, attended by journalists and worldwide members of the games industry, meaning there needs to be things beyond what was shown at E3. Conversely, it's a consumer event and you don't want to reveal all your secrets in one go, do you? Such was the tightrope that this year's Tokyo Game Show walked, perfectly positioned on the brink of gaming's next generation. Sadly, any anticipation we had for big announcements or revelations before the show proved unfounded; blast those internet rumour mills for getting us excited for nothing.

Certainly the biggest disappointment was a lack of anything PlayStation3 from Sony. Despite taking up a massive stand, the machine was relegated to a small, brightly-lit cabinet containing one non-functional unit, while a huge video wall displayed the same technical videos we'd already seen some four months back; hardly the playable demos promised by Ken Kutaragi prior to the show. That Sony then went on record in Japanese magazine *Famitsu* to make excuses for the lack of playable code is even worse, although it does prove just how much Microsoft's determination to press forward with the 360 has effectively forced Sony's hand on the matter of next-gen technology. Undoubtedly, the early appearance of Microsoft's console must seem rather premature for Sony, leaving the company on the back foot as far as hype goes – something it clearly isn't used to.

Of course, that's most likely what Microsoft looked to do all along, although if it had any kind of advantage over the Japanese giant, then it didn't grasp it at the TGS. True, at least the Xbox 360 stand had a dearth of playable code for people to try, but the line-up was far from outstanding. A lack of vaunted titles such as *Perfect Dark Zero, Dead Or Alive 4, Gears Of War* or *Project Gotham Racing 3* left the likes of *Ridge Racer 6* and *Dead Rising* to carry the burden of being the most played games, with the remainder taken up by more Japan-specific games (although, to be frank, that's fair enough given Microsoft's determination to capture the imagination of the Japanese market). Even the company's pre-TGS conference failed to excite as much as it should – outside of the news that Japanese gamers will be getting a ridiculous deal on their hardware (around £190 for the machine with all the trimmings), the whole event fell somewhat flat thanks to a distinct lack of interesting content.



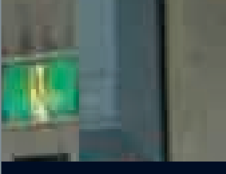
NO-GO

Had it not been for Nintendo's unveiling of the Revolution controller, the whole show could have been a rather lacklustre affair. Revealed during Satoru Iwata's keynote speech to a packed auditorium, the reaction onsite was one of interest and excitement (a far cry from the muted, even cynical reception offered by online communities). The video presentation of how the controller could be used gave people plenty to think about. Admittedly, a lack of anything pertaining to technical demos or any kind of game content whatsoever was disheartening, but the fact that Nintendo had the courage to show the world something different placed it over and above Sony's presence at the show.

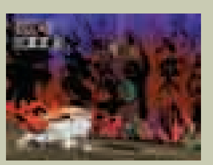
That the unveiling of a controller proved the highlight of the entire event, however, does speak volumes for us. We, as both an industry and as gamers, are on the cusp of the next generation of gaming and yet when the biggest show of the Japanese calendar fails to get us excited, there has to be something wrong. That, or we've finally become completely jaded… but we'd suggest we're still a fair way away from that. Really.

"IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR NINTENDO'S UNVEILING, THIS YEAR'S EVENT WOULD HAVE BEEN DECIDEDLY FLAT"

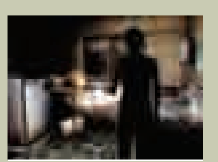
BEST IN SHOW



OKAMI
A standout moment at this year's TGS, despite Capcom only showing off slightly more than it did at E3. But it doesn't take a genius to see how much we love it…



FORBIDDEN SIREN 2
Darker, nastier, scarier – Sony has refined the original (by ditching the awful dubbing in favour of English subtitles) to create a more polished experience this time.



PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE
Sega's expansion of the *Phantasy Star* series looks incredible, so we're now just hoping that it offers a stronger single-player experience over the previous online-centric instalment.



MGS 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS
Only a trailer on show for Hideo Kojima's continuation of the *Metal Gear* legacy, but there wasn't a single person at the show who wasn't amazed by the whole thing.





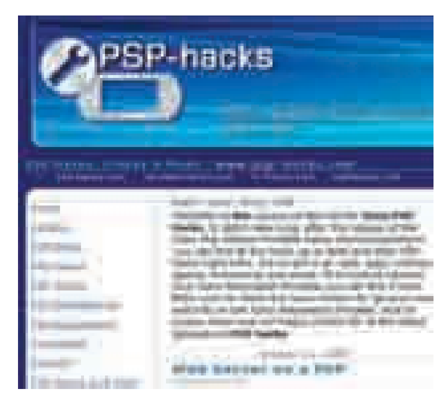
PSP PIRACY PANDEMIC

MORE WOE FOR SONY AS HACKERS DISCOVER YET ANOTHER LOOPHOLE IN CODE

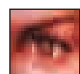
Naughty, piracy-friendly PlayStation Portable purchasers who've been unable to buy a new game for months because of the mandatory PSP firmware upgrade can rejoice. Hackers have found a way to downgrade the PSP version 1.52 and 2.0 firmware, meaning that everybody's piracy fun can continue. And the rest of us can simply frown in disgust.

The patch allows pirates to revert to the homebrew and emulation-friendly v1.50 firmware, the most recent version that allows gamers to run unauthorised software from memory sticks through a code loophole. However, those not entirely certain of their elite skills may not want to try the downgrade themselves, as it reputedly involves many distressing error messages and hard resets.

So once again, enthusiasts have picked the PSP to pieces – and Sony's retaliation will have to be considerable this time around. In an effort to stop piracy, the version 2.0 firmware was introduced with a variety of incentives such as wallpaper options and a web browser in order to encourage people to upgrade and tie up the loose end in the v1.5 firmware's security. Similar new features will have to be introduced in order to persuade people to upgrade again – and Sony is running out of incentives.

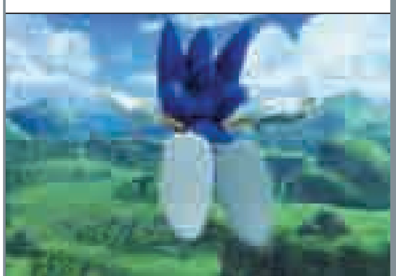


Data stream
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



SEGA CINEMA

Sega announced its intention to open a studio dedicated to complex CG animation and effects production. As part of this opportunity to expand its business into digital animation, the studio will not just work within the gaming sphere when it opens in April 2006. The announcement follows Nintendo's foray into the world of cinematic digital animation, the results of which are due to hit cinemas from next year. Hopefully, the venture will meet with more success than Square Enix's *Final Fantasy* CG film, whose failure eventually caused the closure of the company's cinematic CG outfit.

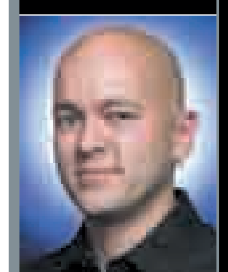


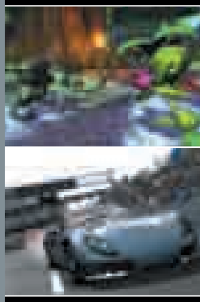


VIDEO KILLED THE ROCKSTAR

This autumn Rockstar is due to enter the world of cinema with a car-modding UMD documentary movie. *Sunday Driver* is about a car club called the Majestics, and is described as, "a portrait of a community working together to build the ultimate customised vehicles while struggling to legitimise their lifestyle under close scrutiny of the authorities." Quite. As Rockstar president Sam Houser states, "Our goal was to create a film with the same cutting-edge, uncompromising content that we strive for in our games."







Less than a month to go and Microsoft *still* can't confirm the launch line-up.

UNLUCKY FOR SOME

J ALLARD PREDICTS DISAPPOINTMENT FOR SOME AS 360 GEARS UP FOR LAUNCH

Famously bald Microsoft executive J Allard has confirmed that there will be 'some disappointment' for retailers and customers around the time of the launch of the Xbox 360. Speaking at the X05 event in Amsterdam, Allard said there was ongoing discussion about allocation for retailers. "It's a dialogue with the retailers and it's not just by territory, it's also by country, and so at an event like this we can actually get some feedback from the retailers," he told gaming website Eurogamer.net.

However, Allard is confident that Europe will not be the sole affected territory. "We decided we're going to take a little bit of heat on allocations in all the territories rather than take a lot of heat in one or two," he admitted. Understandably, this worried a few people hoping to pick up a 360 on launch day, and those who have not pre-ordered may well find themselves disappointed come December.

However, launch worries are not the only troubles Microsoft has faced recently – reports have also surfaced that ten Xbox 360 development kits were stolen from a warehouse in Duren, Germany, with the hardware being believed to have fallen into the hands of hackers. Police raids in Austria and Germany uncovered three of the units but seven are still out there. A few days after the kits went missing, photos of them appeared on the net with the serial numbers edited out. It's not hard to imagine that the thieves are already hard at work dreaming up ways to ruin Xbox Live for all the honest gamers out there, with hacks and patches.

It's been a difficult month for Allard and company, but perhaps not unexpected. When probed about a problematic launch, he replied, "Do I think [the launch] will go flawlessly? I don't." But it isn't all bad news. Market analysis firm Wedbush Morgan Securities has published a new survey on hardware sales in the US and Europe, and it predicts that the 360 will sell 2.5 million units by 2006. This figure breaks down to one million in Europe, with the rest attributed to America. If this prediction becomes a reality, then we could see a much happier J Allard next summer…



"THOSE WHO HAVE **NOT PRE-ORDERED** AN X360 MAY BE **DISAPPOINTED COME DECEMBER**"



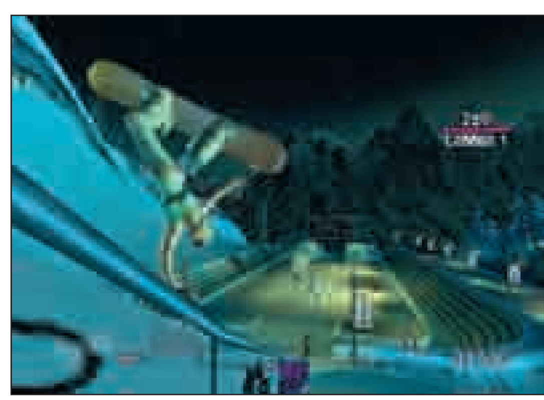
EA FORCED TO PAY

OVERWORKED EMPLOYEES OFFERED PAYOFF

You may remember the furore following the publication of last year's 'EA Spouse' blog on the internet. A disturbing tale of 90-hour working weeks, never-ending crunch periods and total disregard for human dignity, the author claimed that Electronic Arts' working practices regarding staff were, "beyond abomination."

Shortly before that article's publication, a number of EA employees filed a lawsuit against the company claiming compensation for lost overtime and holiday pay. This month, EA offered a huge $15.6 million compensation payment to those involved in the lawsuit ahead of the case going to court. Larry Kirschenbaum, a graphic artist, and a group of his colleagues will share the settlement among them, with any unclaimed funds going to charity.

Because Kirschenbaum and his lawyers have accepted the settlement, the EA case will not go to court – no doubt, to the dismay of employees hoping that EA might be forced to change its working practices and pay the millions of dollars worth of overtime that its artists, programmers and designers claim they are due. Of course, it remains to be seen whether further legal action will be taken, but the debate about EA and other games industry giants' working practises is likely to continue.



EA's games top the charts without even trying, so $15.6 million isn't really *that* much…

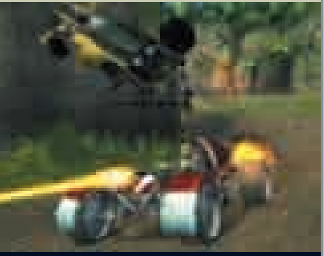
games™ THE TOP FIVE

LUDICROUS PLOTLINES



No.5 MR DRILLER

Too bad Rare has gone rubbish



No.4 OSU! TATAKAE! OUENDAN

Cheerleading saves the world. Yay!



No.3 JAK X

You're going to die. Quick, have a race

No.2 KATAMARI DAMACY

Drunk daddy has broken all the stars



No.1 RIBBIT KING

Play frog golf, win Super Ribbinite. Eh?

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



NO. 38: OUR OWN WORST ENERMY

Why do we do it to ourselves, eh? It's almost as if we crave disappointment. We're the first to admit that we were rather let down by what TGS had to offer, but in many ways it was our own doing. You see, after crawling around various forums and listening to folk who have a tendency to let lies fall from their lips, we kind of started to believe things that were obviously not true and, ultimately, led ourselves to our own discontentment. Lies spread like wildfire in this industry but this is something that tends to be forgotten/ignored when you've read the same factless scrawlings on at least ten websites.

It's strange. Some people use the internet as a kind of 'erroneous reservoir', where they pour all the wrongness they want. Some folk will accept it and even pass it on. In fact, if you search hard enough, you can find sites that actually rate *Vexx* as a playable game. No, really, we managed to find a hilariously inaccurate 8/10 on one site. Sadly, until the technology to force a virtual hand into this virtual world and deliver a well-deserved virtual slap to these over-hyping swines is discovered, we'll just have to nurse our burnt fingers once again and hope that they serve as an adequate reminder of the lesson learnt.

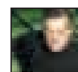


We can't wait to see a bit of *DMC4*. Oh, we can't.

Oh, you wanted to play on the PS3? Sorry. Here you go…

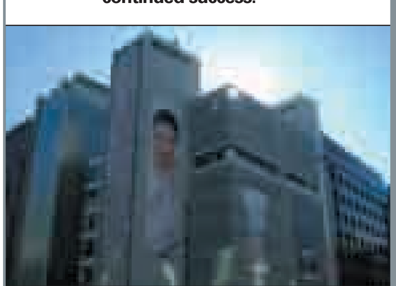


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



END OF AN DEER-A

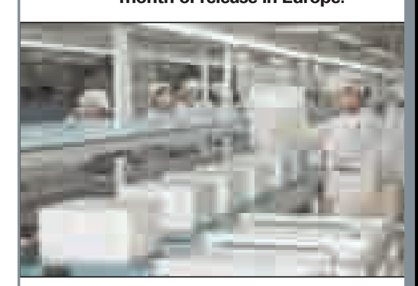
Chris Deering, the man widely considered responsible for the very successful establishment of Sony's PlayStation brand across the UK and Europe, is expected to resign his presidency at Sony Computer Entertainment Europe by next year. He is set to be replaced by Fujio Nishida, currently employed by Sony in Tokyo. Sony CEO Sir Howard Stringer paid tribute to Deering, saying, "The company will long benefit from all the initiatives he has put into place. He has earned our respect, our admiration and our gratitude and we wish him continued success."

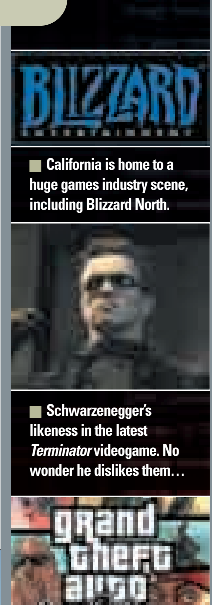




CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN

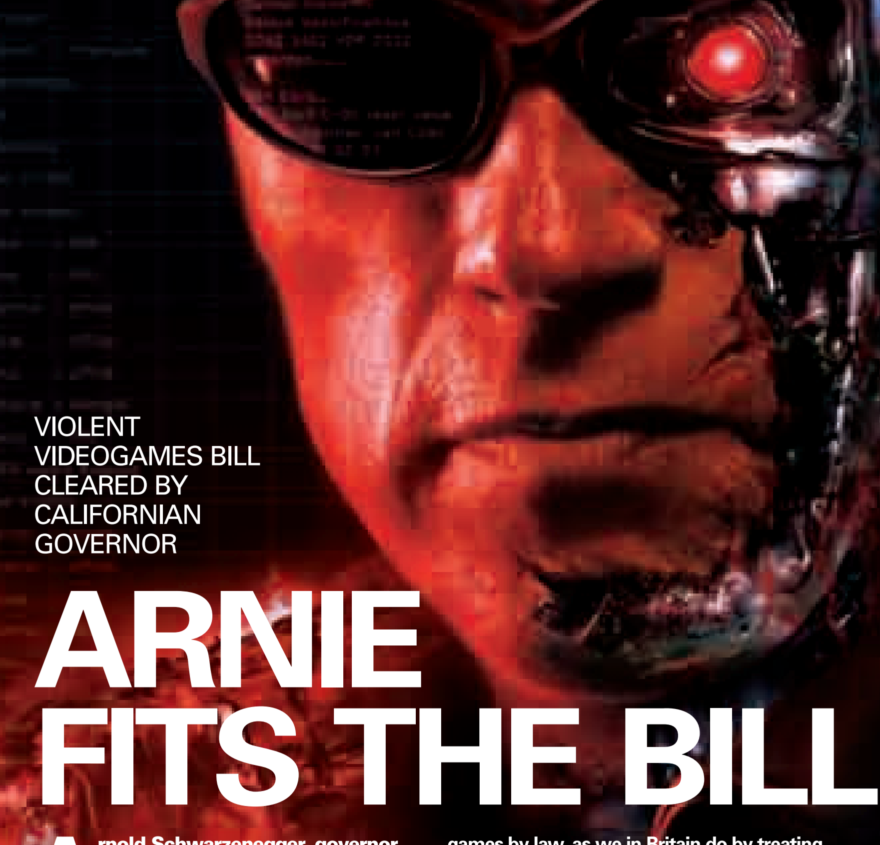
Gamers may think twice about buying an X360 on its launch day after Todd Holmdahl, corporate vice president of the Xbox part of Microsoft's empire, hinted at plans for yearly price cuts following the 360's release. "We will wind up cost-reducing the product every year," he said. After the first Xbox's drastic first-year price drops, which cost Microsoft over $1 billion, the corporation must be wary of upsetting first-day buyers in the same way again. Thankfully, the Xbox's fanbase should give the 360 an easier launch than its predecessor, which allegedly sold just 200,000 units in its first month of release in Europe.





■ California is home to a huge games industry scene, including Blizzard North.

■ Schwarzenegger's likeness in the latest *Terminator* videogame. No wonder he dislikes them…



VIOLENT VIDEOGAMES BILL CLEARED BY CALIFORNIAN GOVERNOR

ARNIE FITS THE BILL

Arnold Schwarzenegger, governor of California, has been under pressure from political peers and videogames trade bodies alike over the signing of a new violent videogames bill. As we go to press, the ex-movie star has just signed the bill introducing heavy fines for retailers who sell violent games to minors, into Californian law.

His decision follows two letters from the board of the Video Software Dealers Association urging him to veto the bill on the grounds that it is "unconstitutional, vague, and subjective." According to the letter, it is impossible to determine whether or not a videogame is violent, due to the fact that each jury member will have different boundaries regarding what they consider acceptable. The bill states that games depicting harm to human beings in ways that are, "heinous, atrocious or cruel," should be classed as unsuitable for minors, making each case subjective. The Entertainment Software Association previously threatened legal action should the bill be written into law, having overturned a similar case in Washington.

Such opposition gives the impression that the US makes a lot of money from selling violent games to under-18s – an impression that does the already much-maligned reputation of videogames no good at all. Preventing under-18s buying inappropriate games by law, as we in Britain do by treating them the same as films, should be seen as a positive action for the games industry. It is hoped that the bill will prevent such tragedies as the several allegedly videogame-related school shootings of recent years.

Schwarzenegger's press release announcing his decision expresses the relief of the bill's advocators. "Studies prove that playing these violent videogames are bad for kids' mental and physical health," said Jim Steyer of Common Sense Media. "The health threat involved with kids playing such games is equivalent to smoking cigarettes." This echoes the sentiment of Illinois governor Rod Blagojevich, who wrote to Schwarzenegger, stating, "Our society already restricts children's access to tobacco, alcohol and pornography because we know they pose a serious risk to child health and development." Schwarzenegger, star of many videogames himself, sees the law as a positive move in safeguarding the safety of Californian children.

"PREVENTING UNDER-18s BUYING VIOLENT VIDEOGAMES **SHOULD BE SEEN AS A POSITIVE** ACTION FOR THE **GAMES INDUSTRY"**



BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



PANDORA'S PIRACY

The owner, senior manager and two store managers of an independent American retailer, Pandora's Cube, have been sentenced to a combined total of nine months in prison, a $250,000 fine, 230 hours of community service and 21 months' house arrest for selling chipped Xboxes loaded with pirated games. The severity of the sentence, it is hoped, will send a clear message to pirates that prosecution to the fullest extent of the law is not only possible, but inevitable should they be caught selling illegal material.





STRIKE FOR INDEPENDENCE

Industry veterans Greg Costikyan and Johnny Wilson are to set up an independent PC games portal to help smaller titles get recognised. Striking out against the difficulty original games undergo in order to break into the competitive PC market. Manifesto Games will provide downloadable versions of interesting, independently developed games from flight sims to MMOGs to text- and graphic-based adventures. The website will launch sometime early next year.



Careful with that PS2 – it's hot, it's smoking. No, really.





PS2 POWER LEAD RECALL UPSETS SONY

UP IN SMOKE

Only a few months after the Xbox power lead fiasco that had 14.1 million Xbox owners across the world sending back their power leads for fear of their houses burning down, Sony has issued a recall for several million slimline PS2 power leads. The affected units were shipped to Europe, Africa, the US, Australasia and the Middle East with PS2 consoles bearing the registration numbers SCPH70002, 70003 and 70004.

National newspaper adverts placed by Sony have advised consumers to return their power leads to the place of purchase for a free replacement, or to visit www.ps2ac.com. In the US, overheating caused plugs to actually melt in come cases, although no cases of such severity have yet been reported elsewhere. Sony's statement was as follows: "As a precautionary measure, SCEE advises consumers affected by this notice to unplug the PlayStation2 and discontinue use until a replacement AC adaptor is provided. We would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused."

Sony cites a subcontractor as responsible for the overheating power leads; Taiwanese manufacturer Hipro Electronics has since accepted responsibility. Returned leads are expected to number several million – and even for Sony, that won't come cheap.



Sakurai's last efforts were on *Meteos* alongside Tetsuya Mizuguchi.



KIRBY CREATOR STRIKES OUT

MASAHIRO SAKURAI IS NEXT JAPANESE DEVELOPER TO FORM OWN STUDIO

Following a long string of departures of high-profile in-house Japanese developers from their respective publishers, Masahiro Sakurai has left HAL Labs to form his own independent development studio. The designer had worked alongside Satoru Iwata, now president of Nintendo, on several prominent Nintendo releases at HAL over the years, including the *Kirby* and *Smash Brothers* games. His new studio, simply called Sora, is reportedly working on two projects, although no details about them have been released.

Sakurai's departure is just one part of an exodus that has already seen the creators of *Resident Evil, Final Fantasy* and *Rez* depart their particular publishers in order to garner themselves more creative freedom. Yoshiki Okamoto, famed for *Street Fighter* and *Resident Evil*, attributed his desertion from Capcom to a lack of creative satisfaction, stating that he was not allowed to work on new or innovative projects due to the success of his previous franchises.

Microsoft has so far thrown money at Okamoto and several other departing design legends in an attempt to persuade them to develop Xbox 360 titles – it seems innevitable that Sakurai will be snapped up before long.


eMag



BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

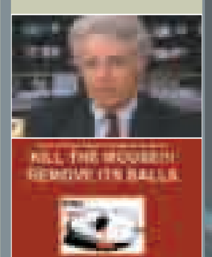


THE BIZARRE COUPLE

Sega Europe has announced a publishing partnership with Bizarre Creations, developer of the *Project Gotham Racing* games and the Dreamcast's *Metropolis Street Racer*. This joint venture is yet another in a succession of Western signings for the Japanese publisher's European arm. The nature of the developer's new, "next-generation franchise," is as yet unclear, but it's suspected to be a departure from its popular racing games. "We are privileged to be working with Sega again," said Martyn Chudley of Bizarre Creations. "With its passion for games and forward-thinking approach, it is the ideal partner to make the most of our new concept."



THOMPSON WON'T TAKE ROCKSTAR'S JIBES



Some of the Citizens United Negating Technology propaganda…



YOU AIN'T GOT JACK

Outspoken US lawyer and videogame industry critic Jack Thompson has taken exception to Rockstar's *Liberty City Stories* website which, he claims, suggests he is a sexual deviant and pervert. Among the site's fake emails which illustrate the background of the game, is one from JT@CitizensUnitedNegatingTechnology warning readers of the dangers of the net.

"The only things worse than the internet are computer games and liberals," reads the email. "Last week I was using the internet to look up information for my teenage niece… searching under 'teenage girls water sports' isn't for the faint-hearted." A link then leads to a website with testimonials from people whose lives have been ruined by the "unambiguous evil" of the net. "Growing up in a strict religious household, I did not know what a penis or a vagina was," reads one. "Then I got hooked on the internet. Now, I am ashamed to admit I have both."

Thompson is not amused, "Bisexual paedophile Jack Thompson is the combined message," he wrote in a letter to US site GamePolitics. "Jack Thompson can assure the world that the only thing to which he is 'addicted' is eating entertainment industry scofflaws for breakfast – and golf." Steady on.

"say what you see"

Meaningless waffle from the industry

THIS MONTH Bill Gates tells us how great the *Halo* movie will be now that Peter Jackson is on board:

"We're confident he'll create an epic that not only thrills existing *Halo* fans, but also introduces millions of moviegoers around the world to this amazing saga."

games™ says: Really? Are you sure it won't just be a big expensive joke like most of the other attempts to drag a videogame onto the big screen? We're not.

MORE FROM MR CHIPS NEXT MONTH!

CYAN BACK IN BUSINESS

MYSTERIOUS FUNDING SEES CYAN STAFF RE-HIRED

Having reported last month that *Myst* developer Cyan Studios was to close its doors, it now appears as though the studio has managed to get back into business. Artists, programmers and other staff are back at work, just weeks after being told their jobs were history.

Studio boss Rand Miller has re-hired most of his staff, telling employees, "We've had a reprieve. Managed to pull a rabbit out of the hat (that I can't give details about yet), so will re-hire almost everybody."

This doesn't mean the *Myst* franchise will continue – *Myst V*, which has enjoyed a positive reception, is still the last in the series. According to Cyan World employee Dean Takahashi, the studio is taking a new direction. Speaking in an interview, Tim Larkin, Cyan Worlds' audio director also hinted at brighter times ahead, "It should be an interesting year… that's one of the great things as well as [one of the] pitfalls of this business. You just never know what's around the next corner."



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

Imagine a geeky teenage gamer dressed like this… not exactly encouraging for today's American youth, is it?

"LITTLE JOE STOOD IN WHAT LOOKED LIKE THE FILMING LOCATION GEAR, CLUTCHING AN M4 RIFLE; HE DID NOT HAVE LOOK OF A

My cable company shuffled all the channels around ostensibly, I believe, to stop me from wandering in all sleepy in the morning, turning on CNN and finding out what's happening in the world. So it was with some disorientation that I stumbled upon the ne'er-visited Spike channel and its confounding new show, *The Ultimate Gamer*.

The premise of the show – which sounds much more forgettable than what is ultimately delivered unto your eyes and ears – is that an individual who plays a lot of games and is deemed 'the ultimate gamer' via submitted video testimonials from his friends, gets to live out a videogame fantasy of some kind. The show I saw centred around a scrawny little man in his mid twenties who – on screen – said of *SOCOM,* "It's my life!" His friends generally corroborated this and so the stage was set for Joe (note: a name I made up) to be transplanted into a lavish, indulgent, real world fantasy centred on the gameplay of *SOCOM*.

Next thing I knew, little Joe was standing in what looked like the filming location for *Predator*, dressed in camo gear and clutching an M4 assault rifle to his chest. He did not have the look of a man who was comfortable. The presenter was giving out – much too quickly and excitedly – a list of improbable-sounding objectives that Joe had to accomplish, things like taking out guards and blowing up supplies. A wide shot showed that we were in generic enemy camp territory, on the edge of a jungle, dusty and guerilla-like, complete with superfluous wooden crates. A jeep pulled up, Joe took cover and two standard khaki-garbed guards got out. A voiceover announced that all weapons were airsoft models and all battle was simulated, but the look in Joe's eyes as he lined those meatheads up and shot them down said he was really starting to live it. Everything was set up to make Joe, this ratty little weed with bad posture, feel like a hero. Something felt… off.

Next up was a little stealth and a trek to an enemy weapons cache with our Joe wading through a river in his combat outfit, looking scared but excited. Here, another little canned moment was waiting for him. With only seconds left on the clock, Joe pulled the pin from a phony grenade and lobbed it at a pile of boxes designated as the enemy weapons stock; unseen pyrotechnicians set off an enormous action movie explosion – this really looked dangerous with Joe well in frame – completing the illusion of a live grenade and ending the mission.

For this, Joe had won some lovely prizes, including the entire PS2 catalogue – literally every game available for the system. And upon returning from the adventure he found his humble gaming den upgraded by an order of magnitude, with three big plasma screens on the wall and an array of new kit.

The concept – recreating the feel of someone's most beloved videogame and letting them live it in the flesh – is pretty good,

FOR PREDATOR, DRESSED IN CAMO MAN WHO WAS COMFORTABLE"

and the budget is high enough to make it worthwhile. However the show just doesn't feel quite right, and there's an inescapable suspicion that everything – the gamer, his friends, the challenge – is staged. Part of *The Ultimate Gamer's* prize always involves a visit to the developer, and the featured game is plugged in a way that leaves you in semi-infomercial unbalance. Joe's visit served as a behind-the-scenes feature on the making of *SOCOM 3,* with the episode crucially airing just one week before the game's release. I wouldn't be in the least surprised if behind the explosions, the actors, the set and the prizes were Sony dollars.

I don't want to sound ungrateful; it is encouraging to see a 30-minute special on a single game broadcast on a lifestyle channel rather than G4, staged or otherwise. Spike is one of those slightly ill-defined men's stations that screens a loose schedule filled with things men like, from *MacGyver* to *Star Trek*, with plenty of cars in between – because we like cars. Vroom! Hats off to them for devoting any air time at all to gaming though; I wouldn't sound nearly as bitter if I could still find *Veronica Mars* of an evening. Why hast thou forsaken me, Comcast Cable… why?

Many thanks



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Miles per gallon



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Thin Anna Nicole



GOT ANY QUESTIONS FOR THE SHAPE? THEN JUST DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net YOU MIGHT GET A REPLY… OR POSSIBLY JUST THE FINGER.

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

KANCAMAGUS HIGHWAY



One of the most scenic roads in all America, Kancamagus Highway winds through the mountains of New Hampshire. Remember when they knew how to design tracks, like in *Need For Speed* for 3DO? This is like that. Every bend is a postcard-perfect view of the mountains, forests and rivers. A classic drive.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	PS2
2	Madden NFL 06	EA Sports	PS2
3	Burnout Revenge	EA Games	PS2
4	Madden NFL 06	EA Sports	Xbox
5	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	Xbox
6	X-Men Legends II	Activison	PS2
7	NBA 2K6	2K Games	PS2
8	Burnout Revenge	EA Games	Xbox
9	Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Vivendi	PS2
10	NBA 2K6	2K Games	Xbox

(Updated 14/10/05)

Ultimate Spider-Man

X-Men Legends II



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"FOR EVERY STONEY FACED GUY YOU SEE PLAYING COLUMNS, ADJUSTED LOOKING GIRLS OR ELDERLY CITIZENS USING THEIR

It's ten months ago: I'm on Tokyo's Ginza Line, playing Namco's *Ridge Racer* on a portable Sony electronics device. Back in December it was *Ridge Racer* on PSP a week before the system's launch and I had trendy fashion girls and grizzled salarymen trying to give me their phone numbers in exchange for a look at the screen. The cars were fast, the action faster, and the graphics brilliant on that eight-lane superhighway of a screen. Fast-forward to early October 2005 with me, again on the Ginza Line headed into Tokyo, wearing the same blue sweater (it's a nice sweater), playing *Ridge Racer.* But not on the PSP – I sold that to your beloved editor for 200 quid last Christmas – no, now I have a white PSP.

When I play *Ridge Racer* these days, it's on my Sony-Ericsson W32S WIN mobile phone, with a two-megapixel screen which it uses only half of in a little box to display the game. I only play it when I'm avoiding phone calls. When you're avoiding phone calls, dear reader, *Ridge Racer* is a pleasant way to stare at the phone without doing anything.

The game came free on my phone. It's 3D and runs at 30fps. It doesn't use any buttons, as braking and accelerating are automatic. Much like Square-Enix's recent smash *Final Fantasy VII Snowboarding,* in Namco's *Ridge Racer* for mobile, you just slide left and right, avoiding things. Unlike *Snowboarding,* there's no jump; this makes the game more elegant. There are palm trees in the background. The announcer won't shut up. You can select from up to ten music tracks, and each of them sounds competent, especially if you're wearing headphones.

And so it is for the first time in two years that I revisit the state of Japanese mobile gaming, and say, "It better hurry up if it's to catch up with the PSP." Moreover, it might be that all the other things I can do with the phone are more entertaining than any game. I can take photos and can even perform wacky effects on them using a built-in Photoshop-style toolset. I can save videos to my 1Gb memory stick, and email up to 10,000 characters at a time with the help of the most complete Japanese electronic dictionary in existence. I can watch TV and listen to AM/FM/TV radio on the damned thing! I can set an MP3 of my choice as my ring tone. This final perk is the final straw that makes Japanese mobiles officially better than Korean ones. I love my tiny little flame-orange and candy-flake purple phone. And if you think that sounds fruity, well, you haven't seen the other colour schemes.

Though you know what? For every stoney faced guy you see playing *Columns, or Fist Of The North Star Pachinko Slot Machine For Mobile* on their phones on the train, there are five or

TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON 38: THE ONE WITH ALL THE TOFU

Ichiban shabu-shabu tabetakatta Tanaka-san wa irasshatteinainode, toufu ni shitanda.

Because Tanaka-san, who wanted to eat shabu-shabu, couldn't be with us tonight, we settled on tofu.

Omee, meccha tabetakatta tte ittetanjanee ka? to watashi wa itta. Kare wa, muri da, tte itta. Ittai naze, to watashi wa itta.

"You really wanted to eat that shabu-shabu, though," I says to him. And he says, "Well, I can't." "Well, why not," I ask him.

Kare wa kou itta: Gonin shinda. Kare ha, toufu ni shinaika? Umai mise he no chizu wo fakkusu suruzo, to itta. Watashi no keitai ni meeru shitoiteyo. Kono chibi wa nandemo dekiru, to itta.

So he tells me this: "Five people died. Anyway, do you want to a really good tofu place? I'll fax you a map." And I says, "Email it to my mobile phone. This little gadget can do anything."

THERE ARE SEVERAL WELL-PHONES TO READ MANGA"

six well-adjusted looking girls or elderly citizens using their phones to read manga. What a novel idea: according to TV broadcasts, the typical Japanese spends three hours a day staring at their mobile, and comic publishers have conspired to distribute simple slideshows of their weekly titles to anyone willing to pay an extra ¥300 a month in subscription fees. The viewing window pans around a page of the comic; press 'Enter' to pause if you read slowly, or put on your headphones for the more cutting-edge titles and listen to a professional reading the panels aloud! It's also cheaper and smaller than a big fat magazine. I reckon that makes reading comics on your phone as interactive as Namco's newest *Tales* game. And any given story is better, too!

I didn't mean to pick on Namco so much in this column. It just happened. I actually like Namco a lot, and am quite angry that *Soul Calibur III* is coming out over there three months before over here. Damn.

Kind regards





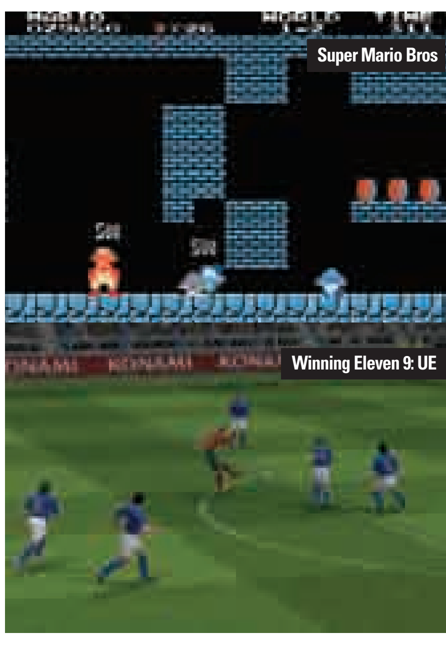
HOW CONVENIENT…

More interesting than the games themselves, perhaps, is the method of downloading them. My old Sony Ericsson phone had an infrared reader that could be used both to turn on my television and to read QR codes. Whenever I try to describe QR codes to someone who hasn't seen them, they assume QR codes are the same as bar codes. Well, they're not. Bar codes represent numbers; QR codes are dot graphs that represent sometimes entire sentences of actual words. Well, the QR reader didn't do much on my old phone. On my new phone, it can do anything. Sometimes companies stick a little QR code in giant billboard advertisements; now I can bask in delight as I aim my phone up at billboards and centre on the code, only to be redirected to some corporate website asking me to take a survey. Damn. Well, if I scan the QR codes in *Famitsu* magazine next to the capsule articles on mobile games, I will be taken to a website and asked if I want to purchase the game. Ingenious! Now that I've scanned the *Dragon Quest* QR code four times and stared at the page, should I actually pay the ¥315 for the game? I mean – why not?

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Dragon Ball Z Sparking!	Bandai	PS2
2	Famicom Mini: Super Mario Bros	Nintendo	GBA
3	Tamagotchi: Corner Shop!	Bandai	DS
4	DS Training For Adults: WYB	Nintendo	DS
5	Dynasty Warriors 5: Mosho Den	Koei	PS2
6	Gentle Brain Exercises	Nintendo	DS
7	Urban Reign	Namco	PS2
8	Super Robot Wars J	Banpresto	GBA
9	Winning Eleven 9: UE	Konami	PSP
10	King Of Beetle Mushiking	Sega	GBA

(Week ending 09/10/05 © 2005 Media Create Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved)


Super Mario Bros

Winning Eleven 9: UE

FROM THE FRONT

UBISOFT FACES TAKEOVER, SONY PREPARES FOR JOB LOSSES, AND MAJESCO SHAREHOLDERS TAKE ACTION



INNOVATION, THAT'S WHAT YOU NEED…?



I hear endless cries demanding innovation and originality, but when I see remarkable games like *Darwinia* failing to find a publisher in the US I realise that what we say and what we do are two very different things.

This isn't news, obviously, but it does warrant consideration. I believe that what the market wants isn't originality: it's refinement. Game ideas haven't changed radically since the early days. We're still racing, platforming and competing in fighting games that, at their core, are just very elaborate versions of *Pong*.

Take the original *Night Driver*, refine it and you get *Burnout 3* or *Out Run 2*. *Donkey Kong* becomes *Shadow Of The Colossus*. Those original rough edges have been sanded away and the gameplay polished, but the core experience remains the same.

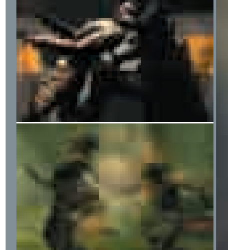
I don't think technology-driven evolution is a bad thing. Single-button controllers were fine but six buttons are better. Digital control does the job but analogue control is more refined. Games were once two-dimensional and monochromatic, now we have full 3D, detailed textures, physics modelling and high dynamic range lighting.

The more things change, the more they stay the same: the games we play are still the same beneath the glossy distractions. And consumers will buy *Age Of Empires III* over *Darwinia* because they like what they had before only this time it'll be a bit more refined.

Next-gen gaming is with us and further improvements will appear. I want to be idealist and say I want nothing but original games, but when I see a new console I can't help thinking, "Hey, I wonder how much better they could make a new instalment of Game X on this stuff." I bet you do too.

Does wanting a better industry make you a jaded person? Mr X certainly seems to think so.

FRENCH PUBLISHER SAYS EA TAKEOVER LIKELY



With profitable and high-quality IPs such as *Prince Of Persia* and *Splinter Cell* to its name, Ubisoft has considerable clout.

UBISOFT UNSAFE?

After months of speculation, a complete takeover of Ubisoft by EA looks increasingly likely. Yves Guillemot, Ubisoft's CEO, recently disclosed that the takeover might still be on the cards despite his company's previous opposition to the idea. Share prices in the French firm promptly soared from €1.36 to €42.2 in just one day.

"We are not safe from hostile action from Electronic Arts, which it would be difficult to block if they made a genuinely interesting offer," Guillemot told French newspaper *Les Echos*, although he made it clear no takeover bid would be considered unless it was at a very high price. He said that if it were in the best interests of shareholders, an offer would be considered. "If someone is interested in our competitive advantages and is willing to pay the right price, then we will choose what is best for our shareholders and employees."

Certainly, an EA takeover could potentially benefit Ubisoft shareholders, considering the rise in share prices based merely on buyout rumours. However, the additional market dominance that such an acquisition would give EA is cause for concern. As a publisher that already dominates the charts, EA's power in the industry should it incorporate Ubisoft would be more or less unchallengeable.

Guillemot's comments come after months of controversy following EA's 'hostile' acquisition of 19.9 per cent of Ubisoft's shares at the end of 2004. Though EA denied any predatory activity, Ubisoft called it "unsolicited and hostile," claiming none of its executives were aware of the deal. Following that acquisition, Guillemot drew up plans to prevent EA from conducting a takeover, supported by European publisher Infogrames and the French government. Now it would appear that the situation has changed; either Ubisoft has been beaten down by the power of Electronic Arts, or opposition from the European games industry has softened.

All this considered, it would not be entirely surprising if Ubisoft was forced to capitulate a hostile takeover bid, although it would be extremely worrying. EA's market share would be enormous, leaving Infogrames as the last European publishing bastion. With EA's vast market presence, that's not something that most industry players would be happy with.

The Aibo division is certain to have its funding cut.



Thankfully SCE is looking as good as ever, as the queues on the PlayStation Portable launch day testified.

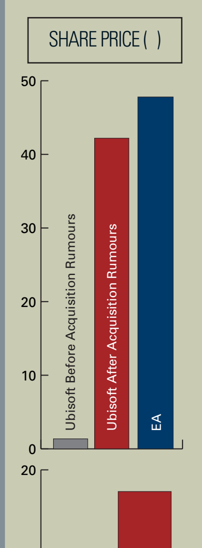
SONY IN THE SACK

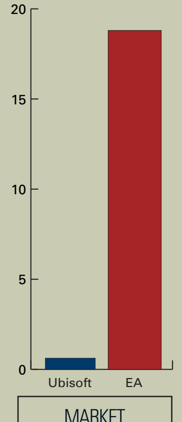
THOUSANDS OF EMPLOYEES DITCHED WORLDWIDE

Following Sony's less than pleasing financial results for the first quarter (reported in issue 36), the firm has announced that it will be cutting 10,000 jobs in an effort to prevent further losses. This constitutes a seven per cent cut in Sony's workforce and will affect 4,000 workers in Japan and 6,000 overseas. The firm is also to close 11 of its 65 manufacturing plants. The changes will be in place by March 2008 and executives hope these measures will help boost Sony's stock prices back up to its shareholders' standards.

Forecasts of a net loss of ¥10 billion ($90 million) across all Sony's business areas have clearly contributed to the decision to make the cuts, as have falling share prices. It's not yet clear whether any Sony Computer Entertainment employees will lose their jobs, but there are sure to be price cuts in the AIBO and Qualia divisions of the corporation. "We must fight like the Sony warriors we are," said CEO Howard Stringer in a rather overblown statement. "We have made promises before, but we failed to execute them." Time will tell whether such downsizing will help the ailing sectors of Sony's empire. Thankfully for the SCE bosses, the PlayStation brand appears to be as strong as ever.







MAKE ME AN OFFER

MAJESCO INVESTORS OFFERED $5 MILLION FOR SHARES

Ailing publisher Majesco has been offered a helping hand this week – but not necessarily a welcome one. Trinad Advisors, which already owns nine per cent of Majesco's shares, has offered $5 million in exchange for 3.3 million shares in the company, with threats of "more aggressive action" should the offer be declined.

"We believe that the company faces danger to its continued existence and prosperity," Trinad Advisors told Majesco's board of directors in a letter. "The time has clearly come for the board to take decisive and aggressive action to begin to deal with the enormity of the problems that now face the company."

The publisher's recent Q3 results showed the company to be in even more trouble than previously thought. Majesco's titles sold much less impressively than expected, meaning that the firm's revenue for the quarter stood at just over $10 million – not nearly enough to fund the next year's operations. Company president Jesse Sutton blamed the industry's current slow phase as well as, "lower than expected sales of key products."





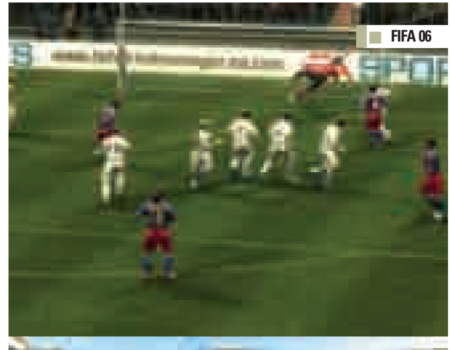
THQ will be publishing Majesco's games in the United Kingdom, such as *Psychonauts*.

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

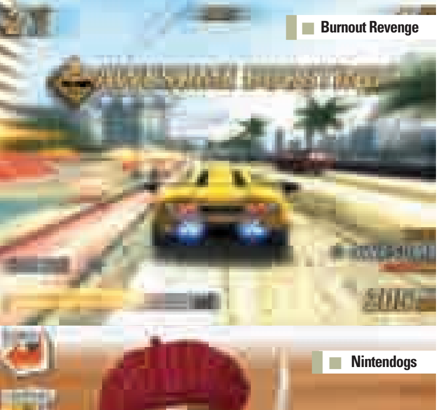
	Title	Publisher	Format
1	FIFA '06	EA Sports	Multi
2	Tiger Woods PGA Tour '06	EA Sports	Multi
3	Burnout Revenge	EA Games	Multi
4	Conflict: Global Storm	Eidos	Multi
5	Far Cry Instincts	Ubisoft	Xbox
6	Black & White 2	EA Games	PC
7	Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	Midway	Multi
8	Spartan: Total Warrior	Sega	Multi
9	Nintendogs: Labrador & Friends	Nintendo	NDS
10	Rome: TW – Barbarian Invasion	Sega	PC

A clean sweep for EA this month, with all three top titles belonging to the publisher. Nintendogs may have done well, but clearly not well enough to make much of a dent on the chart…

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 8 October 2005)



FIFA 06

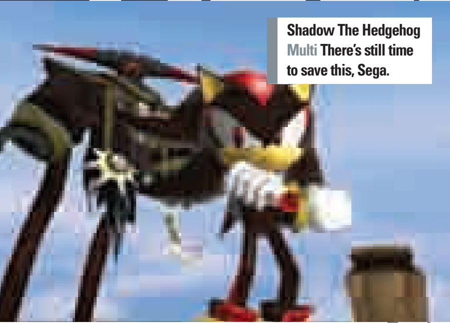


Burnout Revenge

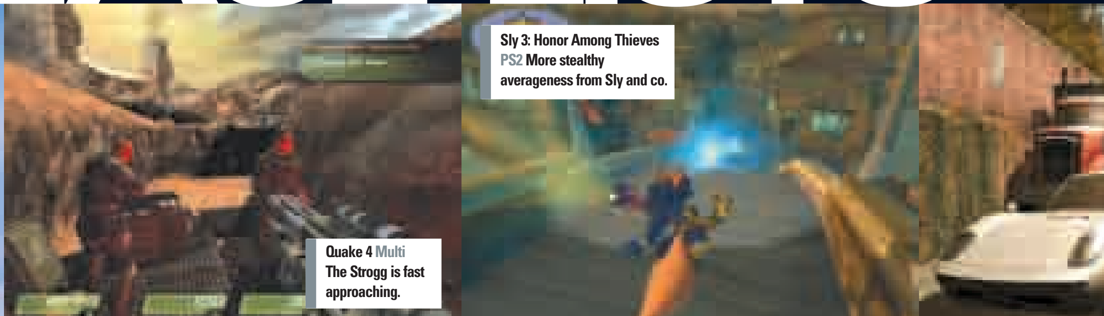


Nintendogs

RELEASE LISTS



Shadow The Hedgehog Multi There's still time to save this, Sega.



Quake 4 Multi The Strogg is fast approaching.

Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves PS2 More stealthy averageness from Sly and co.



OSSU! TATAKAE! OUENDAN

Format: DS
Publisher: Nintendo

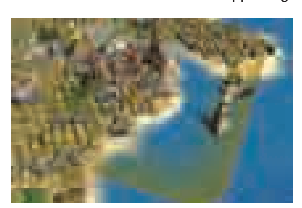
Hard mode – punished. Cheer Girls mode – punished. Despite our domination over all things *Ouendan*, we still can't stop playing it. The lure of multiplayer Wi-Fi battling seems infinitely more appealing than doing work, and there's still a special place in our hearts for that little ghost boy.



CIVILIZATION IV

Format: PC
Publisher: 2K Games

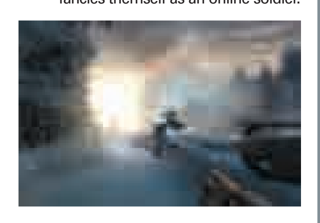
It might be similar to its predecessors, but that hasn't stopped it being as addictive as ever. The draw of building an immense empire is just so moreish. Couple that with a thoroughly comprehensive online mode, and those cold winter nights look a lot more appealing.



BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Electronic Arts

The online demo whetted our appetite, but we were ready for the main course. Thanks to EA, the review code arrived in time to give it the full attention it deserves. This could be the next big Live game, and we'll be happy to take on anyone who fancies themself as an online soldier.



PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER '05			
4 November	Capcom Classics Collection	Capcom	
4 November	Resident Evil 4	Capcom	Wanted
4 November	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
4 November	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	
4 November	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones	Ubisoft	Wanted
11 November	GUN	Activision	
11 November	Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire	Electronic Arts	
11 November	Marvel Nemesis: Rise Of The Imperfects	Electronic Arts	
11 November	The Matrix: Path Of Neo	Atari	
11 November	Ratchet: Gladiator	Sony	
18 November	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	Wanted
18 November	Call of Duty 2: Big Red One	Activision	
18 November	James Bond 007: From Russia With Love	Electronic Arts	
18 November	Soul Calibur III	Sony	Wanted
25 November	50 Cent: Bulletproof	Vivendi	
25 November	Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	Atari	
25 November	Need For Speed Most Wanted	Electronic Arts	
25 November	Shadow The Hedgehog	Sega	
Q4 '05			
TBC	Fear & Respect	Midway	
TBC	Rogue Trooper	SCi	
TBC	X-Men Legends II: Rise Of Apocalypse	Activision	
2006			
TBC	Final Fight Streetwise	Capcom	
TBC	Devil Kings	Capcom	
TBC	Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Onimusha: Dawn Of Dreams	Capcom	
TBC	Okami	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Battlestations: Midway	Eidos	
TBC	Black	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Commandos: Strike Force	Eidos	



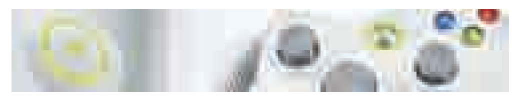
GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER '05			
4 November	Crash Tag Team Racing	Vivendi	
4 November	Fire Emblem: Path Of Radiance	Nintendo	Wanted
4 November	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	
11 November	GUN	Activision	
11 November	Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire	Electronic Arts	
11 November	Mario Baseball	Nintendo	
18 November	Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One	Activision	
18 November	From Russia With Love	Electronic Arts	
18 November	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
18 November	Pokémon XD: Gale Of Darkness	Nintendo	
25 November	Shadow The Hedgehog	Sega	
25 November	Need For Speed Most Wanted	Electronic Arts	
DECEMBER '05			
2 December	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones	Ubisoft	Wanted
9 December	Battalion Wars	Nintendo	
2006			
TBC	The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Viewtiful Joe Red Hot Rumble	Capcom	



XBOX

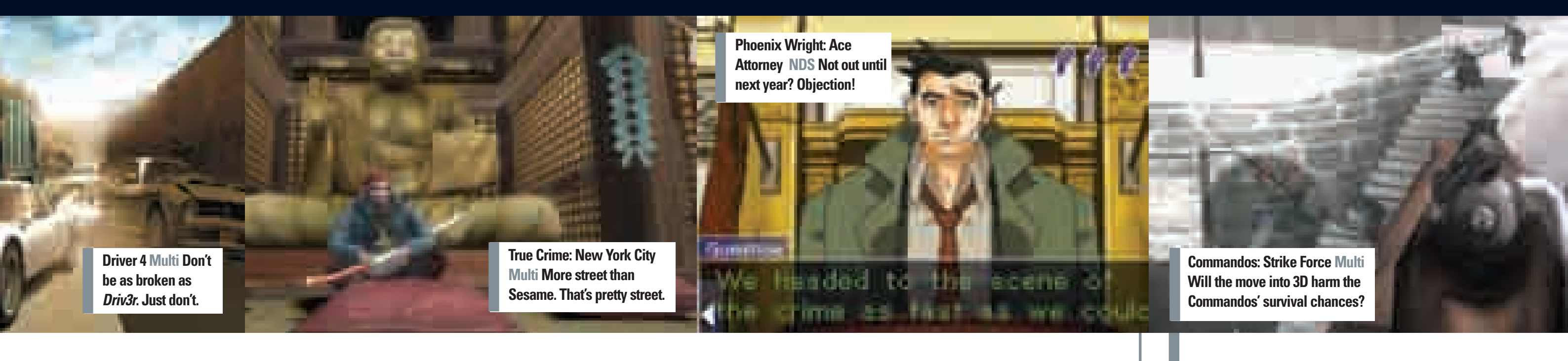
Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER '05			
4 November	Half-Life 2	Electronic Arts	
4 November	Jacked	Empire	
4 November	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
4 November	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	
4 November	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones	Ubisoft	Wanted
11 November	GUN	Activision	
11 November	Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire	Electronic Arts	
11 November	The Matrix: Path Of Neo	Atari	
18 November	Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII	Ubisoft	
18 November	Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One	Activision	
18 November	James Bond 007: From Russia With Love	Electronic Arts	
18 November	Capcom Classics Collection	Capcom	
25 November	50 Cent: Bulletproof	Vivendi	
25 November	Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	Atari TBC	
25 November	Need For Speed Most Wanted	Electronic Arts	
25 November	Shadow The Hedgehog	Sega	
DECEMBER '05			
12 December	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Fear & Respect	Midway	
TBC	X-Men Legends II: Rise Of Apocalypse	Activision	
2006			
TBC	Final Fight Streetwise	Capcom	
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Black	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Battlestations: Midway	SCi	
TBC	Commandos: Strike Force	Eidos	



XBOX 360

Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '05			
2 December	Project Gotham Racing 3	Microsoft	Wanted
2 December	Perfect Dark Zero	Microsoft	Wanted
2 December	Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



Driver 4 Multi Don't be as broken as *Driv3r*. Just don't.

True Crime: New York City Multi More street than Sesame. That's pretty street.

Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney NDS Not out until next year? Objection!

Commandos: Strike Force Multi Will the move into 3D harm the Commandos' survival chances?

2 December	Condemned: Criminal Origins	Sega	
Q 4 2005			
TBC	Alan Wake	TBC	Wanted
TBC	Dead Or Alive 4	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Call Of Duty 2	Activision	
TBC	FIFA '06	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Final Fantasy XI	Square Enix	
TBC	Frame City Killer	EA	
TBC	Full Auto	Sega	
TBC	Ghost Recon: Adv. Warfighter	Ubisoft	
TBC	Madden NFL 06	Electronic Arts	
TBC	NBA Live 06	Electronic Arts	
TBC	NHL 06	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Need For Speed Most Wanted	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Quake 4	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Test Drive Unlimited	Atari	
TBC	Elder Scrolls: Oblivion	2K Games	Wanted
2006			
TBC	Gears Of War	Microsoft	
TBC	Ridge Racer 6	Electronic Arts	Wanted



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER '05			
4 November	Age Of Empires III	Microsoft	
4 November	Call Of Duty 2	Activision	Wanted
4 November	Tycoon City: New York	Atari	
11 November	Football Manager 2006	Sega	
11 November	Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
TBC	Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	Midway	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones	Ubisoft	Wanted
25 November	Need For Speed Most Wanted	Electronic Arts	
25 November	Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	2K Games	Wanted
25 November	The Matrix: Path Of Neo	Atari	
Q4 '05			
TBC	Rail Simulator	Electronic Arts	
TBC	X-Men Legends II: Rise Of Apocalypse	Activision	
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.	THQ	Wanted
TBC	The Movies	Activision	Wanted
2006			
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
TBC	TimeShift	Atari	Wanted
TBC	Phantasy Star Universe	Sega	Wanted
TBC	Battlestations: Midway	SCi	

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER '05			
4 November	Donkey Kong Country 3	Nintendo	
4 November	Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	Nintendo	
4 November	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	
11 November	Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire	Electronic Arts	
18 November	Mario Tennis Advance	Nintendo	
DECEMBER '05			
2 December	Alien Hominid	Zoo Digital	Wanted
Q4 '05			
TBC	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
TBC	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones	Ubisoft	

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER '05			
4 November	SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	Wanted
11 November	Dead To Rights: Reckoning	Electronic Arts	
11 November	Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire	Electronic Arts	
18 November	Death Jr	Sony	
18 November	Lord Of The Rings Tactics	Electronic Arts	
18 November	Need For Speed Most Wanted	Electronic Arts	
Q 4 2005			
TBC	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Midway Arcade Treasures: Extended Play	Midway	
2006			
TBC	Viewtiful Joe Red Hot Rumble	Capcom	
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Monster Hunter Portable	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Daxter	Sony	
TBC	Football Manager 2006	Sega	

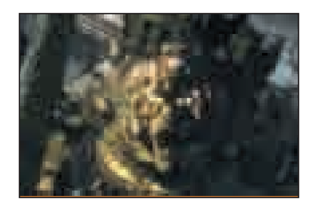
NINTENDO DS

Month	Title	Publisher	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Lunar Genesis	Ubisoft	
TBC	Crash Tag Team Racing	Vivendi	
OCTOBER '05			
14 October	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
TBC	Metroid Prime: Hunters	Nintendo	
NOVEMBER '05			
4 November	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	
11 November	Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire	Electronic Arts	
11 November	Mario Kart DS	Nintendo	Wanted
18 November	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
25 November	Kirby's Power Paintbrush		
25 November	Need For Speed Most Wanted	Electronic Arts	
Q4 '05			
TBC	Mario & Luigi 2	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Marvel Nemesis: Rise Of The Imperfects	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Animal Crossing DS	Nintendo	Wanted
2006			
TBC	Mega Man Battle Network 5: Double Team	Capcom	
TBC	Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Pokémon Diamond/Pearl	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Viewtiful Joe Double Trouble	Capcom	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.



GEARS OF WAR
Format: Xbox 360
Publisher: Microsoft
The latest videos coming out of X05 have provoked interested in Epic's title once again. Graphically, it's a phenomenon, with the kind of intensity and detail that will hopefully define the next generation. We just hope that our fears about the game not playing as well as it looks don't turn out to be justified…

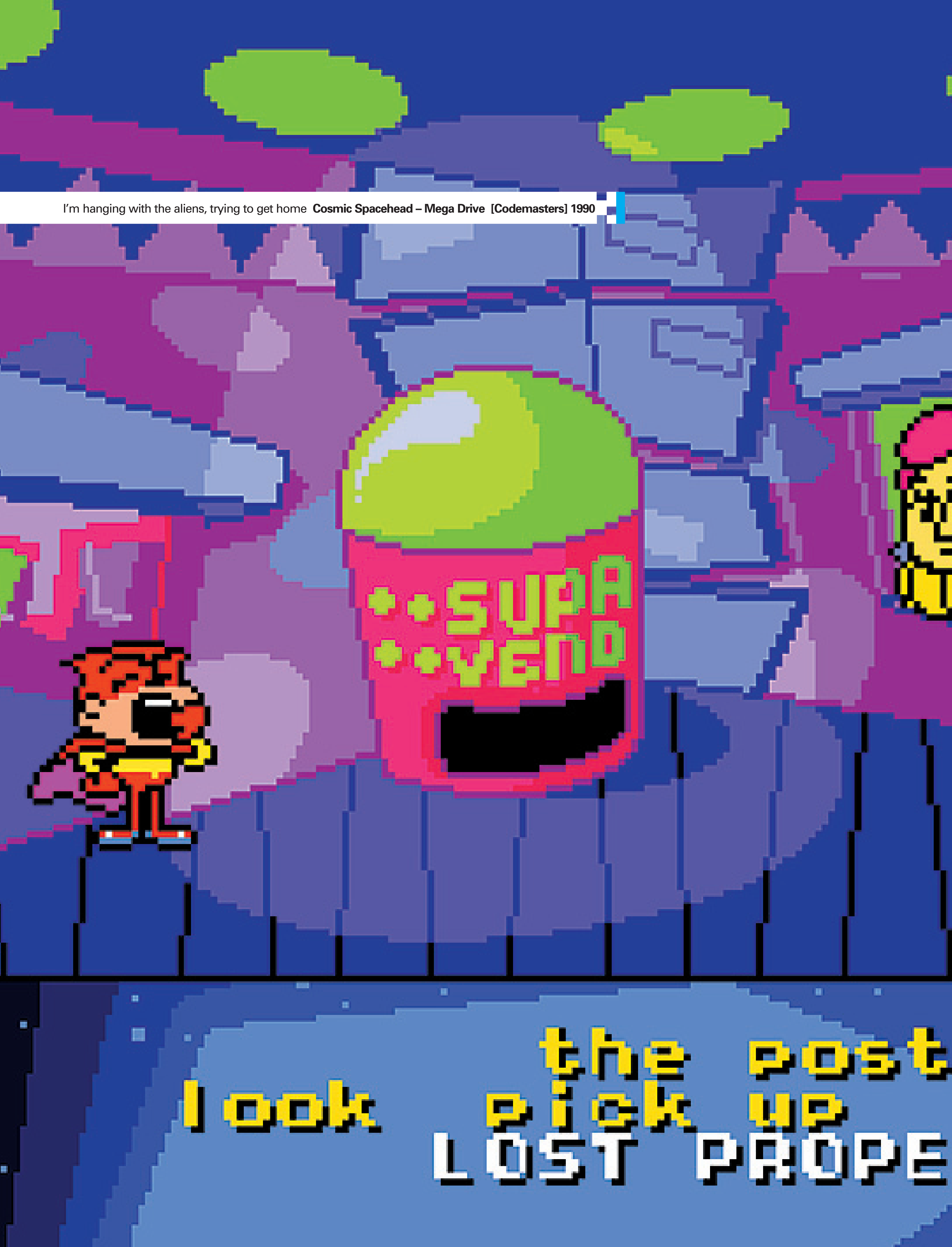


PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER
Format: Xbox 360
Publisher: Konami
With Seabass Tatsuka musing on the possibility of 11-on-11 online matches for the 360, all seems right in the world. These matches would be too unbalanced to join randomly, but could bring a new dimension to online clan matches.

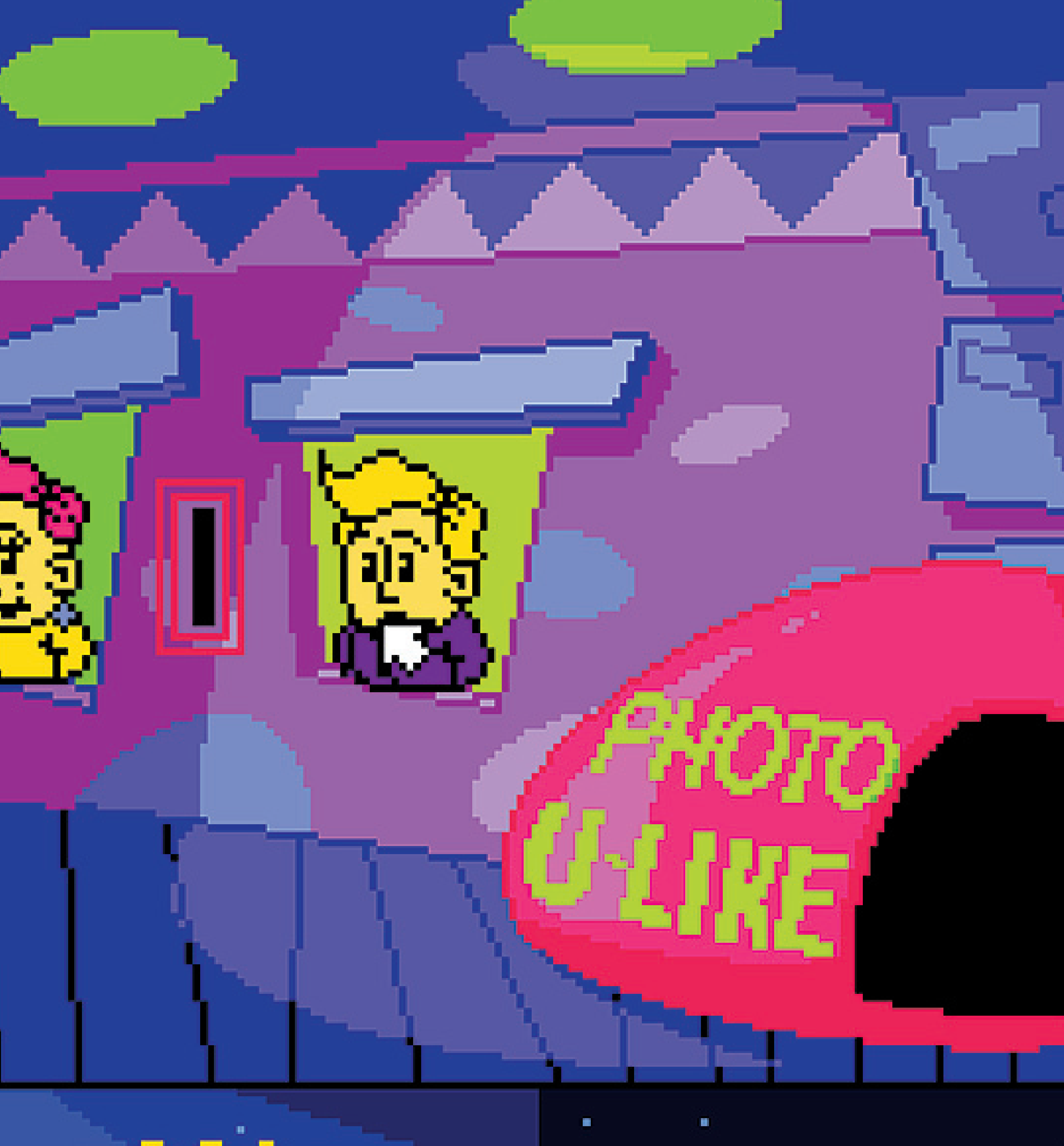


METAL GEAR SOLID 4
Format: PlayStation3
Publisher: Konami
TGS gave us our first real glimpse at what Kojima and friends have in store for us with the next *Metal Gear*. An ageing Snake – coughing his guts up and hooked on pills – stranded in a near-future warzone is certainly a brave choice of protagonist. Indeed, it could well be the best *Metal Gear* experience yet…





I'm hanging with the aliens, trying to get home **Cosmic Spacehead – Mega Drive [Codemasters] 1990**



office
talk give use
RTY OFFICE



"CLOVER'S GAMES ARE SOMETHING LIKE ART, BUT THEY STILL HAVE TO BE A GAME – UNLESS YOU HAVE A BALANCE, IT'S NOT GOING TO BE SUCCESSFUL"
ATSUSHI INABA, PRESIDENT/CEO, CLOVER STUDIOS

OKAMI

CAPCOM'S BEAUTY BRINGS GAMING ART TO HEEL

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Clover Studios
RELEASE: Q2 '06 (Jap: 31 December)
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

DETAILS

■ Despite clearly being a *Zelda*-esque adventure with a twist, *Okami*'s astounding visual style has made it the most eye-catching game on the horizon today.

HISTORY

■ The game's traditional Japanese style is matched by a story set in Japanese mythology – the tale of a god in her earthly form, out to restore balance to the nature of the world.

PS2 **There's a world of difference between a game being visually advanced, and looking beautiful.** Too often, people get the two confused which could prove the downfall of the future of videogame visuals. Take many next-gen titles already shown for the Xbox 360, for instance. *Perfect Dark Zero, Gears Of War, Project Gotham Racing 3…* they all look amazingly (if only because of the power they run on), but we wouldn't class them as beautiful. Impressive, yes; bordering on realistic, certainly, but beautiful? Not by a long shot. Call us heretics, but it's true.

Okami, however, *is* beautiful; gorgeous, even. And while the concept of beauty may be subjective, we've yet to find anyone that disagrees. Now, we're not suggesting that it's art – we'll save the whole 'are games art?' debate for another day – but, as with much of Clover's output, it's certainly a borderline case. The minds behind *Viewtiful Joe* aren't the type to choose style over substance; if they were, people wouldn't be as eager to get hold of *Okami*.

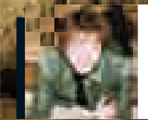
"Clover's games are considered something like art, but they still have to be a game," insists Atsushi Inaba, head of Clover Studios. "Unless you have a good level of balance between the two, then it's not going to be successful. We wouldn't want to make a game that is only art; I don't want to make art. I want to make a game that's fun that has to be bought as a game – that's the key. Yet we still want to make sure it's pretty to look at – the art style, the graphics are key. They're a selling point, so I have to ensure that my games also have a very good visual style."

He's being modest – to suggest that *Okami* has a 'good visual style' is like saying the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel is 'quite nice'. From its exquisite calligraphy style that depicts every detail and movement of Amaterasu (the earthly reincarnation of an ancient sun god that acts as the game's wolf-like protagonist) to the tidal waves of nature that race across the landscape as you restore balance to the world, it all comes down to one fact: the PlayStation2 shouldn't be able to do what *Okami* does. The GameCube, maybe, but not the PS2. And yet, *Okami* flows with grace and elegance, throwing detail around with gay abandon and producing visuals that induce gasps of awe and smiles of satisfaction among its audience. Why the PS2 was chosen exclusively for the game isn't clear (particularly given Capcom's close associations with Nintendo), but there's no denying that the decision has made things slightly tougher for Clover.

"There are limitations on the hardware we're working with, as it's kind of old," ▷

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

It's no surprise that *Okami* is already a 'must have' for some, if only because it stands out against everything else out there today. However, there are concerns that, just like other Capcom cult classics such as *Gregory Horror Show* or *killer7*, it may fail to make a dent on a consumer market that many more dedicated gamers consider clueless. Thankfully, Clover feels that *Okami* gets the balance just right between originality and familiarity to draw in players from all backgrounds. "You can't just make a game that's completely original," states Inaba, "because your consumer will neither understand nor appreciate it. You need to come up with a base that everyone can understand, but then build up around it. Take the iPod, for instance, we could all understand MP3 players, so Apple used the familiar concept and merged it with a new design to make it cool, made it something that everyone wanted to own. That's what you have to do with an original game and what we've done with *Okami* – base it on an original shell that everybody can understand, but throw in the new design, the original aspects, the new art, and that's going to make it feel like a fresh, new, creative product."

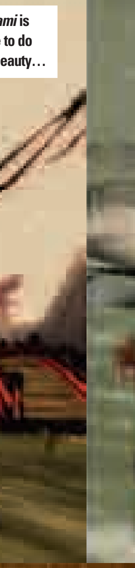


DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Despite having worked in Capcom's Production Studio 4 for many years previously (including being the mind behind *Steel Battalion*), Atsushi Inaba become more widely known at the end of 2002 through his involvement in *Viewtiful Joe*. Being placed at the head of the team allowed him to move on and eventually found Clover Studio some two years later.

HISTORY

- **UNDER THE SKIN**, 2004 (PlayStation2)
- **VIEWTIFUL JOE**, 2003 (Multi)
- **STEEL BATTALION**, 2002 (Xbox)



■ The best thing about *Okami* is that you don't actually have to do anything to appreciate its beauty…

admits Inaba. "We took a lot of trouble first determining what kind of art we wanted to use and then afterwards, we had to figure out how we were going to realise it on hardware that was outdated. It wasn't the polygons that were the problem, because this is more cel-shading than anything – it was trying to make that art look the prettiest, look fluid and smooth, and have it realised in the way we envisioned it on the PS2. That was the biggest challenge."

Nevertheless, it's a challenge that's been undertaken with aplomb by Clover, to create something genuinely attractive in *Okami* rather than simply making a game that looks good. What's more, the calligraphy style is more than just a visual aid – it carries over to the gameplay as well, through the use of the Celestial Brush. Just as the cel-shaded visuals suggest they've been painted on canvas (an effect that looks great in screenshots, but is far more impressive when moving), so the Celestial Brush – which takes the form of Amaterasu's tail – allows you to literally 'paint' the world around you. Need to turn night into day? Look to the sky and draw yourself a sun. Found a lifeless tree that needs resurrecting? Draw an aura around it and the branches explode with blossoms. It's even handy during combat, allowing you to slice through enemies. Cutting through obstacles, creating paths, rebuilding destroyed structures, even putting star constellations back into the sky, the brush offers plenty of scope but, as Inaba is keen to point out, it's far from just a gimmick.

"IF OKAMI DOESN'T DO WELL AT RETAIL, IT'S A SURE SIGN THAT THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH PEOPLE BUYING VIDEOGAMES TODAY"

"There are 13 brush techniques throughout the game, and each can be used in many different ways," he says. "A lot of them can be used in ways that you would not at first realise, and so as you progress through the game you begin to master these techniques and use them whenever you feel like. The whole idea of exploration and puzzle solving was always going to be part of the game, and there are ▷



■ The Celestial Paintbrush in use – this vine, once drawn, flips you across to a distant platform.



■ Amaterasu's skills extend into combat too, with the wolf being surprisingly adept in a fight.

JUST LIKE A PRAYER

As a god in earthly form, Amaterasu's powers are initially limited to basic combat and movement; not surprising, considering how much of it is, in part, derived from the belief of humans living in this world devoid of colour. However, by fulfilling the wishes of said humans – answering their prayers if you will, albeit in a physical sense – players can help restore belief and thus enhance their own abilities. Naturally, much of this boils down to various mission-based tasks although such conventional gameplay elements are far from boring, thanks to the way *Okami* is styled. Even the simplest mission becomes a chance to find unexplored territory, more places to restore nature to and, of course, more monsters to slay…



■ You think it all looks pretty on the page? We can't even begin to do it justice - you should see it in motion.

also lots of quests that match the Celestial Brush perfectly, so it really works out. Basically, it's an element in the game that nobody is going to get bored of – they will feel that it deserves to be implemented throughout the game."

We can't think of any other games that offer such a unique level of interactivity between a lead character and the world around them. That isn't to say that it's so original, so unlike anything else that the majority of the game-buying public won't appreciate it (although, going on the limited Western success of similarly different Capcom titles like *Viewtiful Joe* or *killer7*, there are concerns that *Okami* will prove a cult hit and not the success it so rightly deserves to be). With cel-shaded visuals, adventure progress that involves satisfying people's desires while following a wider-arcing mission to save the land, and easy-to-handle control system – not to mention the level of detail shown across the land – the game has the same feeling that *The Wind Waker* conjured up when we first played it. That there's always something new to find, some new corner of the world as yet undiscovered, or some insignificant detail that's enough to bring a smile to your face only heighten that feeling… .

Of course, it doesn't take a genius to see that we're incredibly high on Clover's creation; **games**™ was founded on a premise of championing the games that we feel deserve recognition and, in our eyes, there's none more deserving than *Okami*. True, our cynical nerve taunts us with the possibility that the gaming masses may prefer 'Generic Action Shooter #35' over the rich and verdant landscape of Clover Studio's world, but then we'd like to think that people are a little more educated than that… or at least willing to try something that perhaps they wouldn't normally. Hopefully, *Okami*'s visual flair will give it that edge necessary to tempt more than just the hardcore contingent – if it isn't, the last scrap of hope we have for the industry reclaiming some of its lost artistic talent may just die along with it.

"CAPCOM HAS A HISTORY OF MAKING REALLY GOOD ACTION GAMES, SO MAKING ONE BASED AROUND A DIFFERENT SORT OF CHARACTER WAS EASY FOR US"

ATSUSHI INABA, CLOVER STUDIOS

MAN'S BEST FRIEND

Having an animal as the lead character of a game – one that behaves as it should, rather than taking on human characteristics – is a fairly rare occurrence, making *Okami* a unique title right from the off. However, it also raises issues as to how the gameplay would be sculpted around such a premise; a dog's ability to open doors or use weapons, for example, aren't exactly well noted. Thankfully, Clover has worked around the problem to ensure that *Okami* remains true to its hero while also offering traditional gameplay elements. "When it comes to basic functions that a person can easily do, it's not necessarily an area we were worried about," says Inaba. "When you think about it, a game like *Resident Evil*, where you get a herb and eat it, it doesn't show Leon actually eating the herb. What you choose to show and how you choose to show it is something that you can easily change during the design process, so we did just that. Just because it's a wolf, doesn't mean that they had any more complications than they would have with a person."

OKAMI
PLAYSTATION2

COMPANY PROFILE

■ Based in Osaka, Japan, Clover Studio is a wholly owned subsidiary of Capcom, founded in July 2004. Initially comprised of several high-ranking Capcom staff members (including Atsushi Inaba, Kenzo Tsujimoto and Yoshifumi Yamashita), the company now employs over 60 people working on a variety of projects.

HISTORY

■ **VIEWTIFUL JOE 2**, 2004 (Multi)
■ **VIEWTIFUL JOE**, 2003 (Multi)



■ The deeper into the adventure you go, the bigger and nastier your demonic enemies become…

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

A GAME WITH A REAL PEDIGREE

GOD ON EARTH x NATURE + ZELDA = OKAMI

"OKAMI IS UNDENIABLY BEAUTIFUL IN A WAY THAT VERY FEW OTHER GAMES ARE – ELEGANT, STYLISH AND FULL OF LUSH DETAIL ALL AT ONCE"

NINETY-NINE NIGHTS



Sadly, the game doesn't look quite as nice as these rendered sequences…

Surveying the carnage is fun, but not as much as wading in, sword swinging.

NINETY-NINE RED PLATOONS

Here's a question for you – what happens when you cross the creator of *Rez* and *Lumines* with the developer of the heavy hitting *Kingdom Under Fire* series? You might hazard a guess at 'a stunning-looking battle game, featuring hundreds of on-screen enemies mixed with Jean Michel Jarre-style lightshows, and great sound,' and you'd be quite right. Well done, two points.

Ninety-Nine Nights (or *N3*, as it's also known) plays exactly as you might expect. Immediate comparisons can be made to Koei's *Dynasty Warriors* as well as *Kingdom Under Fire* itself; the character charges headlong into huge crowds of enemies and deals death to all and sundry, with a number of melee-based attacks. However, unlike *KUF*, *N3* is being billed as pure action. Just seeing that many enemies on screen at once (as well as watching them fall through combos that can number into the thousands) is almost overpowering at first, and it takes a good few minutes of slack-jawed astonishment before you can get to the task of administering hideous death to everyone in sight. Although the numbers on screen don't quite match up to the early screen shots (at least in this build), they still eclipse every other game of this ilk… and by quite some way. The draw distance seems infinitely further than that of *Dynasty Warriors*, and it's an awesome sight to see your opposing army stretching out across the horizon.

Of course, in order to overcome the sheer volume of antagonists, your character has been endowed with some rather hefty special powers. Playing as female warrior Inphyy (dressed in very cool red armour with metallic angel wings), you can demolish huge groups of foes with the visually arresting special attacks. By collecting the red orbs dropped by fallen enemies (à la *Onimusha* or *Devil May Cry*), you can fill up a power meter and when that's full, you're free to unleash one of the tastiest moves ever seen in an action game. Moving as quickly as Dante after a crate of Red Bull, you slice through countless foes, lifting them into the air, as the game slows down to show off your undoubted coolness. This is where Mizuguchi's influence is most apparent. Accompanying the bullet time is a spectacular light show, where all the orbs rise in time with the falling bodies, glowing with the kind of intensity the Xbox 360 chucks out with ease.

However, there are a few problems with *Ninety-Nine Nights* that cannot be ignored even at this early stage. Firstly, the build we saw was worryingly glitchy. Inphyy moved through trees and dead bodies as if they weren't there, and there was some very noticeable pop up which distracted from the on-screen carnage. Obviously, there's still development time available to remedy these problems, so we'll refrain from passing judgment at this stage.

More worrying, though, was the gameplay itself. *N3* does little to expand on the *Dynasty Warriors* dynamic, simply offering a basic hack and slash combat system that, although allowing for some huge combos, looks likely to become tiresome far too quickly. The special moves do add a little variety to the incessant button mashing, but if the game's later stages do not offer anything new, then *N3* could struggle when it hits the market. Still, under the guidance of Mizuguchi, there's always the potential for something fantastic.

"BILLED AS PURE ACTION – JUST SEEING THAT MANY ENEMIES ON SCREEN AT ONCE IS ALMOST OVERPOWERING AT FIRST"

COMMAND AND CONQUER

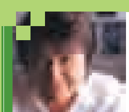
Although *N3* is very much an action game, it does allow tacticians to flex their brain muscles a little by giving you troops to order about the battlefield. It's a stripped-down squad-based system which allows you to simply ask your buddies to tear into particular regiments or stay back to protect you from an impending onslaught. However, Mizuguchi is keen to reaffirm *Ninety-Nine Nights*' action status, calling the game "80 per cent action and 20 per cent strategy." Still, it's nice to have the option, and it will help to break up the monotony of hacking and slashing. Hopefully it will be integrated smoothly, matching the game's all-action ethos.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Microsoft/Phantagram
DEVELOPER: Q Entertainment
RELEASE: TBA '06
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1 (Online TBA)

CONCEPT

A *Dynasty Warriors* for the next generation, with hundreds of enemies on screen at any time and a draw distance that makes Koei's title look silly.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Tetsuya Mizuguchi, creator of the seminal titles *Rez*, *Space Channel 5* and the recent *Lumines* on the PSP, has set up his own studio, Q Entertainment. *Ninety-Nine Nights* is somewhat of a departure for Mizuguchi – there's not a music section or Kandinsky influence in sight.

HISTORY

- **METEOS** 2005 (DS)
- **LUMINES** 2005 (PSP)
- **REZ** 2001 (Multi)

Now, if we were shallow then we'd love this girl purely for her amazing eyes…

Combo attacks reaching up into the thousands in just a few minutes? Sounds lovely.

"THE FOCUS OF THE GAME IS ACTION. WE WANT THE GAMER TO FEEL THE EXCITEMENT OF THOUSANDS OF CHARACTERS ON THE BATTLEFIELD"

TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI, Q ENTERTAINMENT

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE BIG NS

DYNASTY WARRIORS + KINGDOM UNDER FIRE + KAMEO = NINETY-NINE NIGHTS

TRUE CRIME: NEW YORK CITY



"WE ARE BRINGING DRAMA TO VIDEOGAMES ON AN UNPRECEDENTED LEVEL THAT IS ON PAR WITH MOVIES AND TELEVISION SHOWS"
WILL KASSOY, VP OF GLOBAL BRAND MANAGEMENT, ACTIVISION

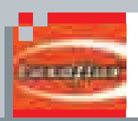
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

TAKING OUT THE TRASH, NYC-STYLE

TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF LA - HOLLYWOOD + TIMES SQUARE = TRUE CRIME: NEW YORK CITY

■ Heavy traffic? Comandeer a bike and weave through it like a little noisy mouse.

■ New York's famous flying sharks can swoop in and end fights early. Honest..



DEVELOPER PROFILE

A subsidiary of Activision, Luxoflux's catalogue is nothing if not varied. Based in Santa Monica, California, the 90-strong firm's rather dismal *True Crime: Streets Of LA* somehow created one of Activision's most lucrative new brands. People really will buy anything…

HISTORY

- **SHREK 2** 2004 [Multi]
- **STAR WARS DEMOLITION** 2000 [Multi]
- **VIGILANTE 8** 1998 [Multi]

WE'RE NOT SURE YOU DO WANT TO BE A PART OF IT, FRANK…

Some things are just meant to be. Having walked away from a demo of the particularly uninspiring True Crime: New York City, we stroll back to our desks to do the usual pre-preview research only to find that Luxoflux is advertising for a gameplay programmer. A little late in the game's schedule, perhaps, but a discovery dripping with comedy and tinged with irony all the same. Of course, we know it probably isn't a position on the *True Crime* team – hell, it's a cheap shot at best. But unfortunately, that's the only kind of attention this game really deserves.

This isn't some kind of biased snap judgment either. As it stands right now, *NYC* remains a generic and derivative experience that simply doesn't play very well at all – to throw such a title into a genre so clearly dominated by a single brand would be considered commercial suicide if the original *True Crime* hadn't sold so inexplicably well. Sloppy controls (particularly in hand-to-hand combat) mar what could be a fairly entertaining experience, but Luxoflux is clearly trying to make up for this in other areas.

"*True Crime: NYC* was developed with the help of two former New York cops who advised us on real-life police scenarios," Activision's Will Kassoy assures us. Hopefully this will mean that *True Crime 2* doesn't degenerate into a feast of undead silliness and dragon nonsense like the last game. Unless that's actually what happens in *New York*, of course.

"[These] were then brought to life by the rich characters portrayed in the voice-over talent," Kassoy adds. This cast of stars includes Lawrence Fishburne, Christopher Walken and Mickey Rourke, all drafted in to improve the game's cinematic feel – it works to a point, but when games like *Fahrenheit* are pushing the cinematic envelope, it'll take more than a few names to excite us. *LA*'s lead character Nick Kang is gone, so while he sits in the City of Angels eating chips or whatever, ex-gangster-turned-hero Marcus Reed strolls into the limelight as the cop who can play by the book or take the law into his own hands as the player sees fit.

So while the whole 'good cop/bad cop' options are still in place, Luxoflux has played down the branching storyline aspect – a shame, given that this was one of the original *True Crime*'s more interesting features, even if it didn't really work. But once again, the developer has created an impressive setting for the game, rendering a detailed and expansive chunk of New York. Accurate down to the differences in feel and attitude in each of the game's 'hoods, you have to give Luxoflux credit for its work in this area.

With a tighter focus on one or two of its many elements, *True Crime* has the potential to be vaguely decent, far more so than the early build we got to play. Improvements over the last game seem scant, but it would be no surprise to see it fly off the shelves this Christmas anyway – the original game was a massive hit for Activision and won the heart of many a casual player while more seasoned gamers turned their noses up at its arrogance, clunkiness and general mediocrity.

It's not like we want *True Crime* to fail, but in its current state, *New York City* simply doesn't deserve the attention it's likely to receive without a new Rockstar console rival on the shelves this Christmas.

"WITH A TIGHTER FOCUS ON ONE OR TWO OF ITS MANY ELEMENTS, TRUE CRIME HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE VAGUELY DECENT"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Luxoflux
RELEASE: Dec '05
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

A sequel to the best-selling new IP of 2003, expectations are high for *New York City* – with a few tweaks, it might be slightly more playable than its mediocre predecessor.

KUNG FU CHAOS

One nice feature of *True Crime* is the ability to learn martial arts styles. Not much use against an armed mob, but if you confront a similarly weaponless foe, expect to win. Though close-quarters combat is something of a mess, a few well-placed kicks is all most guys can take before going down, leaving you to make an arrest or just kill them. Expect repercussions for your actions – good guys climb the career ladder and earn extra treats, but it's so much fun to be bad, especially when the streets of Harlem are lined with creeps with a distinct lack of respect for that badge of yours.



He might know kung fu (whoah) but Marcus still loves breaking people with spades.

PARAWORLD

THE LAND THAT REAL-TIME FORGOT

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Germany
PUBLISHER: Deep Silver
DEVELOPER: Sunflowers/SEK
RELEASE: Q1 '06
GENRE: RTS
PLAYERS: 1 (Online 2-8)

CONCEPT

Build up an army of dinosaur-riding warriors and then, as usual, seek and destroy those who oppose you. Simple.

Eons ago, dinosaurs wandered the Earth – alone. A couple of hundred years ago man discovered their remains and is now making a game about using them as tools of war. Isn't man a truth-teller? Perhaps not, but at least someone has finally discovered something much better than a heap of brittle bones: *ParaWorld* takes the PC strategy game genre by its war-torn wrists and feeds it to the raptors, before spewing out a prolific, Jurassic RTS hybrid.

The concept behind *ParaWorld* is fairly straightforward, however, in action the game is far from simple. The graphical effects and physics are on a completely different reptilian scale; dust rises high into the air as vast numbers of detailed dinosaurs rage across the screen toward one another, ripping humans to shreds before violently attacking themselves in a primal fashion.

The ability to hone dinosaurs and other primeval creatures at your strategic will is an original concept in *ParaWorld* – your player will have to establish a solid army of men and dino warriors, all with their own repertoire of class-specific attacks and finishing moves, before setting out to destroy rival colonies while at the same time protecting your own. Battles will commence across a large group of natural locations with varying dinosaurs living in each area such as tropical jungles, freezing mountains and barren deserts; even some volcanic spots reminiscent of the time dinosaurs were supposedly made extinct make an appearance. Whether that era will work on screen however, remains to be seen, but what we are sure of is the beautifully conveyed destruction.

Replacing war factories are assorted meagre villages that are just begging to be obliterated, as most of the buildings are made of wood. Tanks and vehicles are exchanged for prehistoric creatures and carts. For example, bringing an enemy Diplodocus crashing down to the ground is more satisfying than blowing apart machines like we've all done too many times before. However, without gun warfare, the lack of rocket-fuelled explosions in this ancient world may be saddening in the long term.

As well as the obvious single-player campaign modes and the option to select one of three distinct tribes, the ability to take these solid skirmishes online will also be made available for eight gamers to participate across the internet at once. At present each player will be able to command over 50 wild animals including 40 dinosaurs, most of them gargantuan in size. Although it isn't confirmed if the mighty Tyrannosaurus Rex makes an appearance or not, it's pretty safe to say he'll be hidden in there somewhere – after all, what's a dinosaur game without him?

More importantly, those concerned that the fights will become overly similar, close-range affairs can put their fears to rest. A number of wild beasts can be imbued with long-distance skills, adding depth and, of course, strategy to the game. For example, the Brachiosaurus can be equipped with a hefty catapult on its back for launching rocky projectiles at bigger targets, and certain troops on rhinos can fire arrows from atop the thick-skinned mammals.

ParaWorld's vicious fangs should make other popular strategy titles seem weak in comparison when it's let loose early in 2006, but whether it'll continue to do so is debatable. At best this'll be a subtle evolution of the RTS genre, rather than a full-scale revolution.

REMOTE CONTROL

A new pyramid system has been implemented into *ParaWorld's* design, improving the user interface and thus making it easier to command your troops as you wish. Titled 'The Army Controller,' it enables the player to conjure up hundreds of combinations for their own strategic means – from battle formations to movement style. For example, you can split your units up into various areas of importance; perhaps placing grunts in the foreground with speedy raptors just behind as backup, then larger long-range dinosaurs positioned at the back of the pack will prove an effective attacking method. Maybe not, but it's down to the gamer how they approach each situation, adding individual replay value to the game.

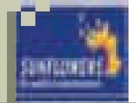
"EXPLORING A VARIETY OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS WITH DINOSAURS AT YOUR COMMAND IS A HIGHLY INTRIGUING CONCEPT"



Somehow, the only image that springs to mind here is of that monster having his choice of the human buffet table…



Bigger monsters come in handy, but you'll need men to bolster the ranks if they happen to fall.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Founded by Adi Boiko and Wilhelm Hamrozi with the aim of making fun, unusual games, Sunflowers is very much the EA of the German game market. It has produced the two most successful games ever to come out of Germany – RTS hits *Anno 1602* and *Anno 1503* – which sold over 4 million copies combined.

HISTORY

- **KNIGHTS OF HONOR** 2005 (PC)
- **ANNO 1503** 2002 (PC)
- **ANNO 1602** 1999 (PC)

The Dorset hunt rides again – we'd hate to be the fox on the end of that one.

"THE 'ARMY CONTROLLER' PROVIDES PLAYERS WITH COUNTLESS, HITHERTO UNPRECEDENTED POSSIBILITIES WITH REGARDS TO PERSONAL STRATEGIES"
SUNFLOWERS PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BACK TO THE PRIMITIVE

ACT OF WAR - WMD + DINOSAURS = PARAWORLD

SOCOM 3: US NAVY SEALS

THIRD STRIKE IMMINENT FROM SONY'S MILITARY SEALS



■ Ah, the minigun – a Navy Seal's favourite toy. Well, it is when we've got one anyway.

When the first *SOCOM* title was released two years ago, its appeal derived primarily from the headset – allowing players to discuss strategies and exchange ideas as they played. With Xbox Live wiping the floor with anything the PS2 has to offer, however, the initial 'wow' factor that derived from talking across the internet has worn off, so Sony will have to push its third *SOCOM* game to the limits if it's to reap any success.

While the second *Navy SEALs* improved on the original by fixing its bugs, the latest game throws a whole bundle of extra goodies into the mix. The most notable inclusion is that of land and water vehicles, no doubt adding a whole new element to the military tactics of the AI and, more importantly, the gamer. What makes it seem evermore certain of realistic squad-based action is the fact that it's also been developed in collaboration with real US Navy SEALs. Because of this, the movement, particle effects and AI have all been significantly boosted to make the game more believable. The enemy will carry out co-ordinated attacks in relation to the player's actions, as well as falling back or blind-firing if the situation requires it.

Set in areas of Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe, efforts have been made to improve *SOCOM's* flagging Single-player mode. With regular save checkpoints on maps six times the size of those in *SOCOM 2*, mission failure will no longer mean having to attempt the whole level again. Also, new team commands allow the SEAL team to respond more swiftly when given orders and multiple paths can be selected, bringing much-needed depth to the single-player campaign.

However, *SOCOM 3's* true shining point will hopefully lie in its already enjoyable Multiplayer mode, accessible on either an LAN or via the internet. With people swimming, driving and planning assaults at different sections along the much larger maps, it may seem rather difficult to imagine them locating one another at first. Thankfully, the game capacity has been upped to a possible 16 players per team, ensuring networked matches become substantially hectic. So as long as nothing goes horrendously wrong between now and the December release date, *SOCOM 3: US Navy SEALs* could very well be the high point for the series.

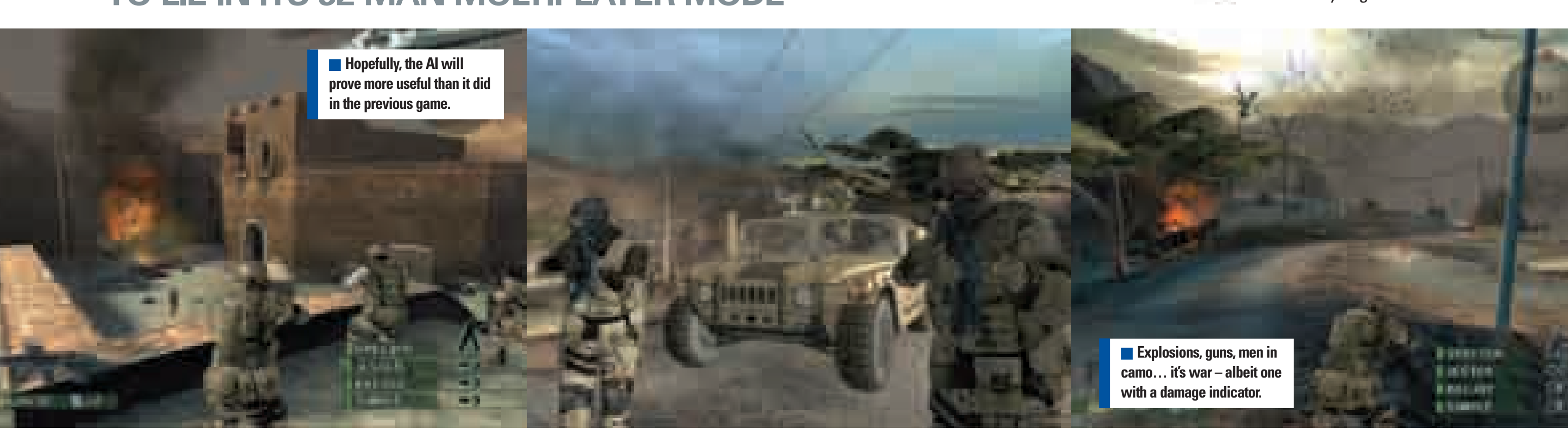
> "SOCOM 3'S TRUE SHINING POINT APPEARS TO LIE IN ITS 32-MAN MULTIPLAYER MODE"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Zipper Interactive
RELEASE: Dec '05
GENRE: Strategy/Action
PLAYERS: 1 (Online 2-32)

CONCEPT

■ The SEALs return with an improved Single-player and the ability to go online.



■ Hopefully, the AI will prove more useful than it did in the previous game.

■ Explosions, guns, men in camo… it's war – albeit one with a damage indicator.


eMag

CASTLEVANIA: CURSE OF DARKNESS



"EXPLORING DRACULA'S INNER SANCTUM FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE WILL PROVIDE PLENTY OF ENJOYABLE NEW GAMEPLAY EXPERIENCES"

HANS-JOACHIM AMANN, HEAD OF PRODUCT MANAGEMENT, KONAMI EUROPE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

FANGS FOR THE MEMORY

DEVIL MAY CRY + SCARY PETS - DRACULA = CURSE OF DARKNESS

Curse Of Darkness brings the 'level up' system back, so it's worth killing those monsters.

CASTLEVANIA: CURSE OF DARKNESS

XBOX/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ *Curse Of Darkness* producer Koji Igarashi joined Konami ten years ago and worked on popular Japanese dating sim, *Tokimeki Memorial*. He's been involved in the *Castlevania* titles since *Symphony Of The Night* in the Tokyo studio that developed all the games in the extensive *Castlevania* series.

HISTORY

■ CASTLEVANIA: DAWN OF SORROW, 2005 (NDS)
■ CASTLEVANIA, 2004 (PS2)
■ CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW, 2003 (GBA)



■ If there's one thing *Castlevania* always offers, it's gigantic enemies to fight - you won't be let down here.

KONAMI RAISES THE STAKES YET AGAIN – THIS TIME WITHOUT THE VAMPIRE

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '06
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Another 3D *Castlevania* involving hacking, slashing and levelling your way up through hordes of demons – all with a little help from some devilish new friends.

Sporting a giant sword, donning a blood-red sash and with grey hair streaming across his face, *Castlevania's* latest hero could easily be mistaken for a similar gaming slayer. Still, you have to hand it to Konami, the Belmont family has been tirelessly slaughtering vampires for a good 18 years now and the developer clearly feels it's time to ditch it in favour of a fresh new champion called Hector.

As a former lieutenant of Dracula, Hector returns to the castle seeking revenge on Isaac – an old friend who framed his girlfriend as a witch, resulting in her death. Of course, Dracula's demise three years prior to the events in *Curse Of Darkness* means no sign of the dark prince here, but the infecting curse spreading across Europe since his death does mean that Hector's path is blocked with all manner of foul creatures for you to destroy.

And for this a whole range of weapons are at hand, from the bog-standard sword to a graceful spear and even a monstrous, lumbering axe. Depending on the deathly device you choose to wield, moves and combos will change accordingly – small weapons like daggers slice faster than Gordon Ramsey on Speed but deal less damage, and vice versa. In essence, there are just two attack buttons, one to bash repeatedly and the other to dish out more brutal flurries of violence at certain points in a combo.

After clearing a room, an arrow points to the next unlocked destination containing, not surprisingly, more enemies. As monotonous and incredibly similar to the last PS2 game as this kill-and-go style of gameplay should be, so far Konami seems to have pulled it off effectively by making it feel more like *Golden Axe* than *Dynasty Warriors*. It's a shame, then, that what we've seen of the game's movement up to now is nothing but a sharply jagged display of standard polygons. Even the CG cut-scenes don't flow as well as they should, which allows rivals like *Devil May Cry 3* to wipe the floor with the current presentation of this title.

What also strikes you about *Curse Of Darkness* is the rather disconnected camera. While it's pleasing to discover freedom, in that the right thumbstick revolves around Hector, there's still no 'zoom out' ability and this, in turn, forces the player very close to the action, distracting you from the important slaying.

There are some good points however, as some welcome RPG elements have been brought to the *Castlevania* series. An experience bar has been added since the last outing, meaning that defeating monsters will eventually cause a level up, improving your health and attack power. You can even employ friendly demons for your cause – all with surprisingly good AI. The variety of nasty demons, including the classic *Castlevania* skeletons and ghouls are equally well designed with some impressive bosses for you to battle – giant Minotaurs and femme fatales with winged demons to name but a few.

As it stands, *Curse Of Darkness* seems to be developing into an absorbing horror hack-'em-up, with plenty of action and variety – albeit in 3D, the dimensional bane of most *Castlevania* fans. We just hope the camera and player movement are brushed up before the game's release early next year.

"THE MIXTURE OF DEMON SIDEKICKS AND RPG ELEMENTS ARE A WELCOME ADDITION"

YOU LITTLE DEVILS

There are in excess of 30 'Innocent Devils' to seek out that, once acquired, can perform a variety of moves and abilities, from the Skeleton Warrior's blitz of mini throwing-swords to the Fairy's healing technique. However, only one creature can be on screen at once – it's up to the player to decide which NPC is best for each situation. For example, you can utilise them to access new areas by using a Phoenix to glide across a chasm, or complete puzzles easily by stopping time with the Mage. Issuing each command costs hearts, which can be replenished by defeating opponents; keeping them up is vital to make sure those ghoulish critters level up, learn new moves and stay on form.

KEY OF HEAVEN



The orbs in the corner represent elements – use the right ones to defeat enemies.

“YOU DIE AS YOU LIVE, WITH A FLASH OF THE BLADE”

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA ’06 (Japan: Q1 ’06)
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1 (2 Wi-Fi)

CONCEPT

A successfully condensed 3D roaming slash-’em-up, melded with various RPG elements.

Between the likes of Game Republic’s *Genji*, Capcom’s *Onimusha: Dawn Of Dreams*, Koei’s *Dynasty Warriors* and now in-house development *Key Of Heaven*, it seems Sony has the sword-wielding Japanese legend genre well and truly sewn up. That these games sometimes appear to meld together into a homogenous lump is neither here nor there, although Sony’s own attempts to bring the genre to the portable medium do at least manipulate a few basic concepts into a game that tries something a little different. Naturally, the game’s appearance on the PlayStation Portable makes it unique (particularly with only the slightly flat *Dynasty Warriors* PSP for company), but it’s *Key Of Heaven*’s approach to swordplay that adds the twist.

The setting is all rather predictable – demonic force rampages across feudal region, young swordsman loses father in mysterious circumstances, joins forces with young girl to discover the truth behind the disappearance and so on. To be frank, it’s not that important, although the game’s RPG elements mean you have to pay attention for at least some of the time to know what to do next. Luckily, this mostly means running across the landscape, slaughtering anything that gets in your way with your mystical sword – hardly brain surgery by any stretch of the imagination.

However, it’s through the composition of your slaughtering that the real depth comes into play. While performing moves requires only a small number of button presses, the fact you can completely customise hero Shinbu’s move-set makes for some genuine satisfaction. The game offers over 150 different moves to earn (all of which can be traded with fellow players through Wi-Fi link-up, although some have to be downloaded through the PSP from an official website), and while there are 30 set move combo scrolls to discover, you can also tailor five scrolls, consisting of combo strings up to ten moves long, to your liking.

According to Sony, this contrast of simple combat and deep strategy allows gamers from all backgrounds to enjoy *Key Of Heaven*. While we can see the point, we can’t help but feel the single-button combat may be a little repetitive for anyone but the most easily pleased gamer. Even so, the PSP needs some fresh material amid the torrent of PS2 ports, and *Key Of Heaven* may be enough to tempt the average PSP owner.

The fully motion-captured animation runs smoothly on the PSP’s handheld screen.

> “THE MOVE SYSTEM SEEMS DEEP, BUT THE SINGLE-BUTTON COMBAT MAY PROVE A LITTLE REPETITIVE”


eMag

STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR



We're all for the greater good, but there really is nothing like stomping around in an AT-AT…

IT'S ALL-OUT WAR IN THAT GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY

Before you conjure up repressed memories of LucasArts' previous (and dreadful) foray into the realm of the Star Wars RTS, be advised: Empire At War seems like something special. Set a few years before *Episode IV: A New Hope* and exploring the ramifications of those political manoeuvrings we all had to suffer in *Revenge Of The Sith*, the Empire is blossoming, the Rebel Alliance is retaliating, and Darth Vader has finally learned to steady himself on his new prosthetic limbs. Times are dark; and in a galaxy of turbulence, a strong leader is required to guide each side to victory… which is exactly where you come in.

Developed by Petroglyph, under the watchful eyes of ex-Westwood staffers who worked on the acclaimed *Command & Conquer* titles, *Empire At War* enables you to play as either an Imperial or Rebel leader and aims to deliver something a little different from the normal RTS fare. While other titles are happy to keep engagements firmly situated on terra firma, this game lets commanders wage war both on the ground and among the stars – simultaneously. That's right, while your stompy AT-ATs are raining laser fire down on a heavily defended Rebel shield generator, you can scoot up into space and order a squadron of TIE Fighters to hunt down and destroy a fleeing enemy Cruiser – assuming they can first fight off the approaching company of Y-Wings that have rounded on your Star Destroyer.

But of course, there's nothing to say you have to play fair in a rock/paper/scissors fight to the death, because there's also a number of powerful super units that can be called to the aid of each side should the going get a little tough. Those who believe that the Empire has all the best toys will relish the prospect of heaving the Death Star into orbit around a cowering Rebel stronghold, then gleefully flicking the switch to see the entire planet explode in a shower of sparks.

Rebel leaders do have the chance to counter, and interestingly – sending a fleet of X-Wings to destroy enemy capitol ships or space stations isn't just a matter of blasting them continually – they have individual target points that have to be taken out if your plan is to have any chance of succeeding. Hitting systems in the right order can make things much easier (for instance, destroying the shield generator increases damage ratio), so victory depends more on strategic assault than just sending in enough cannon fodder to overrun the enemy's defences.

Of course, large-scale destruction is a rare and costly enterprise, so it's just as well that you can call on certain hero units to help out in key battles. Imperial players will get to march Darth Vader himself into the fray, while Alliance commanders can draw on the strengths of Obi-Wan Kenobi in a bid to bring order to the conflict. In short, you can expect Lightsaber duels and Force powers aplenty.

To call the scale 'massive' would be to do the game a serious injustice. *Star Wars: Empire At War* is gunning for that same epic sense of conflict that makes the films such an enveloping experience. And one look at these screenshots should be enough to send an excited tingle down the spine of any *Star Wars* fan that thinks they might have what it takes to rule the galaxy.

"THE EMPIRE IS BLOSSOMING, THE REBEL ALLIANCE IS RETALIATING, AND DARTH VADER HAS FINALLY LEARNED TO STEADY HIMSELF ON HIS NEW PROSTHETIC LIMBS"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Petroglyph
RELEASE: 7 Feb '06
GENRE: RTS
PLAYERS: 1-2 (2-8 Online)

CONCEPT

Pick a side and rewrite history in the *Star Wars* universe by waging war on land, air and in outer space. You may fire when ready…

RISKY BUSINESS

While crushing foes in gloriously kinetic 3D battles on the ground and out in space is where the true spectacle lies, there's actually a third level of play that serves to knit these engagements together. For a large portion of *Empire At War*, you'll be overseeing the grand strategic manoeuvrings of your fleet around the galaxy in a *Risk*-like game of systematic oppression. Much like the map sections found in *Rome: Total War*, these stages enable you to construct bases, create troops, fortify key locations, and plan engagements to edge you closer to galactic domination. It's when your forces meet opposition that the game zooms you into the conflict, where you pull on a helmet and take full control of the ensuing slaughter.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Largely consisting of ex-Westwood employees who shaped the *Command & Conquer* series, Petroglyph is hoping to define the RTS genre with this, its maiden title. Things must be looking good, because the developer has just signed with Sega to work on a new military franchise.

HISTORY

STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR is the first title from Petroglyph

Each planet has its own unique style and looks visually very impressive.

> "USING AN ENTIRELY NEW ENGINE, THE GAME WILL FEATURE BEAUTIFULLY RENDERED LAND AND SPACE BATTLES SET ON MEMORABLE PLANETS SUCH AS HOTH, TATOOINE AND DAGOBAH"
> *LUCASARTS PRESS RELEASE*

When we talk about scale, this is what we mean – hundreds of troops, running everywhere. Lovely.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ANOTHER EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

DARTH SIDIOUS + MON MOTHMA x ROME: TOTAL WAR = STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR

SEGA RALLY 2006


The African landscapes call for some last-minute shouts of, "Mind the giraffe!"

GENTLEMEN, RESTART YOUR ENGINES

PS2 ***Sega Rally 2006*** **proved very popular with the crowds at this year's Tokyo Game Show, drawing an enormous queue of fans eager to see the series' first ever console exclusive.** It's hardly surprising, considering its TGS appearance was the first time the game had been shown in playable form. It seems the change in nomenclature from 2005 to 2006 hasn't actually been mirrored by changes in the now almost finished actual game, though.

New to the series is the improved Career mode, designed to give console gamers more than just the short bursts of action that have long been the focus of the arcade versions. Starting out as an unknown driver, the player makes his or her way through 200 racecourses until the money rolls in and the cars are all plastered with sponsors' stickers, and tuned up beyond recognition.

Of course, the Arcade and Time Attack modes are available for a quick run-through of the game's courses which span a wide range of locations. Scandinavian and African tracks were on show at TGS and each one was playable under a selection of different weather conditions and times of day, making for some visually striking races. Speed effects are also impressive; *Sega Rally*'s accessibility matched with the high speeds make the game very satisfying to play.

Despite Career mode's added depth, the game still feels arcadey – other cars don't put up a fight when being overtaken, and crashing or going way off-track results in little retribution. Going through checkpoints with only a few seconds to spare is as tense and entertaining as ever and overall, the game has maintained the high-speed, high-octane feel and nature of the *Sega Rally* arcade games.

The fact that *Sega Rally 2006* will appear on the PlayStation2 as opposed to the arcades has had little bearing on the game and we can look forward to that fast-paced action we've grown accustomed to from the series. Strangely though, Sega Europe refuses to acknowledge the game's existence at the moment, so anyone hoping to experience what this new take on the series has to offer should focus on the January release currently scheduled in Japan.

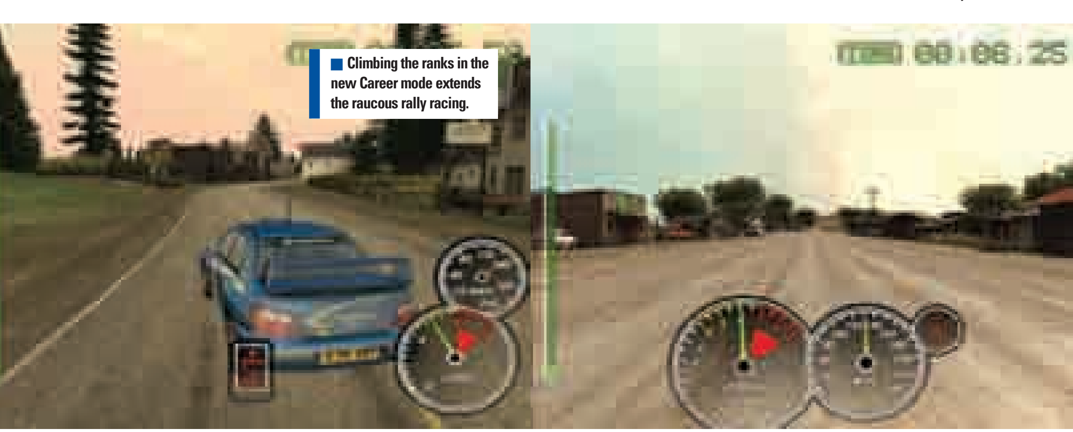
"SEGA RALLY'S ACCESSIBILITY MATCHED WITH THE HIGH SPEEDS MAKE THE GAME VERY SATISFYING TO PLAY"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA (Jap: Jan '06)
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

Complete with new Career mode, the series' debut on the PS2 is a first.


Climbing the ranks in the new Career mode extends the raucous rally racing.


The interest in *Sega Rally* at TGS shows how eager the console audience is.


eMag

COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE

WHAT DO YOU MEAN THEY'VE TURNED IT INTO AN FPS?

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PC, PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Pyro Studios
RELEASE: Q1 '06
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1 (2–TBC Online)

CONCEPT

A first-person re-imagining of the successful *Commandos* series – use a Green Beret, a spy and a sniper to carry out multiple objectives in levels based in France, Norway and Russia.

There have been more than a few raised eyebrows since Eidos announced the new direction that the beloved *Commandos* series is taking. What was once a hardcore stealth strategy game viewed from above, is now a first-person shooter, and at first glance, looks no different to the endless mire of identikit WW2 games that have flooded the market this generation.

However, Eidos is insistent that the focus of the series hasn't been lost and from our brief time with the game, we're inclined to agree. *Commandos Strike Force* is still a deeply tactical game and about as far away from *Medal Of Honor* as a WW2-based FPS can be. Operating in a similar way to the *Conflict* games, you're given control over the three soldiers of the Strike Force, with the option to switch between them at any time. Naturally, the team comprises three characters, each with their own unique attributes and skill sets. First up is the Green Beret, an expert in close quarters combat and heavy weaponry; secondly, there's a spy, who's the master of stealth; and thirdly, you have a sniper, who is good at, yes, sniping people with a sniper rifle. The characters are certainly clichéd but having control over all of them at any given time gives the game that tactical edge that will separate it from the pack.

The most immediate difference between *Commandos* and the rest of the World War 2 sub-genre is its difficulty. Not only is it not recommended to dive headlong into confrontations with the enemy, it's also downright impossible. Charging at your foe will lead to a severe hammering, so in order to succeed, stealth, tactical nouse and a strong knowledge of the lay of the land are crucial. By positioning your men intelligently, it'll be possible to co-ordinate some thrilling attacks, outflanking and outthinking the game's above-average AI, and taking each small bit of territory at a time. Happily the game is non-linear, in that each mission can be approached how the player sees fit, with multiple routes and options, allowing for some *Deus Ex*-style experimentation when approaching mission objectives.

There are problems though, for starters the game looks terrible. Although graphics are far from the most important aspect of a game, it's difficult not to be disappointed when the Xbox version looks little better than a two-year-old PlayStation2 game – with patchily textured landscapes and character models that are lacking in detail. True, there are a few really clever touches, such as dust falling from the ceiling of a church's basement when a tank trundles overhead, additions like this do add character but don't save the game from looking distinctly average.

The move into first-person hinders the game's stealth mechanic somewhat. Although enemy soldiers have clearly marked cones of vision, and *MGS*-style icons that appear over their heads, there's no escaping the ambiguity of the stealth parameters in this early build. At the moment, it's too difficult to tell when you're about to be noticed by an enemy, and the game's combat is too loose to cope with ferocious firefights.

Still, we're holding reasonably high hopes for *Strike Force*; the game still crucially feels like *Commandos* and there's a lot of satisfaction to be had with the squad-based gameplay. Hopefully, the remaining development time will be enough to turn a rather ugly duckling into beautiful swan. Ahh.

BOOM! HEADSHOT!

Everybody loves a good snipe. The satisfaction of lining up a perfect headshot, squeezing the trigger, and watching your enemy's skull snap back with a shower of claret is always immense. Pyro Studios is very aware of this, and has equipped *Strike Force's* sniper with one of the most powerful rifles war games have ever seen. It's possible to line up two, even three, enemy soldiers in your sights, and watch with glee as your bullet passes through them all. Add a nice, brief bullet time feature, and you've got yourself one of the best marksmen in videogaming. Boom indeed.

"STRIKE FORCE IS STILL A DEEPLY TACTICAL GAME, AND AS FAR AWAY FROM MEDAL OF HONOR AS A WW2-BASED FPS CAN BE"



Long-distance sniping takes practice, but is far better for your own health.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

The driving force behind the *Commandos* series certainly knows its stealthy WW2 strategy; Pyro Studios is desperately trying to reach the mass market with *Commandos Strike Force*, but is determined to do so without compromising the series' principles. At this early stage, it looks like Pyro has succeeded in its task.

HISTORY

- **COMMANDOS 3: DESTINATION BERLIN** 2003 (PC)
- **COMMANDOS 2** 2002 (Multi)
- **COMMANDOS: BEHIND ENEMY LINES** 1998 (PC)

The screen-in-screen camera keeps you updated on key events elsewhere.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

GOING COMMANDO

COMMANDOS + MEDAL OF HONOR + CONFLICT GLOBAL STORM = COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE

It's not exactly *Commandos* as we remember it, but at least Pyro is trying to remain faithful.

"COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE TAKES YOU RIGHT INTO THE HEART OF THE ACTION FROM A FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVE"

EIDOS PRESS RELEASE

SHADOW THE HEDGEHOG



Yes, he's supposedly a bit of a bad ass… can't you tell from that mean look he's got?

The gunplay isn't nearly as important as it appears, although it's still not great.

SONIC TEAM'S GENRE-REDEFINING MASTERPIECE, OR A SHADOW OF PAST GLORIES?

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, GC, PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Sonic Team
RELEASE: 25 Nov (US: 15 Nov)
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

A *Sonic* game with guns but crucially not starring Sonic himself. Unfortunately, the game looks less than spectacular in its current state…

Every now and then, a game idea turns up that instantly brings out our cynical side – The Simpsons on skateboards springs to mind. Sometimes, the idea will turn out brilliantly; who would have thought that driving Mario around in an underpowered kart could be so much fun? However, at other times our gut instinct doesn't let us down. Unfortunately, it looks like *Shadow The Hedgehog* falls into the latter category.

Despite our initial misgivings about a *Sonic* game filled with attitude and weaponry, we were desperate for Sega to pull this off. Sadly, a lengthy playtest confirmed our worst fears: *Shadow* is a poorly designed, poorly executed videogame that utterly lacks the charm of the *Sonic* games of old. Shadow himself borders on hateful; a brooding 'emo' version of Sonic, drowning in a sea of middle-class teen angst. He travels on skates at suitably high speeds but controls like Bambi on a unicycle. On ice. In a headwind. Yes, he's difficult to control.

The bulk of the game's levels involve rapidly skating into the screen, trying (and failing) to avoid the obstacles that litter the 'roads' and stopping to shoot adversaries with a number of unoriginal weapons. In its current state, this is a genuinely nasty game to play – the balance between high-speed rushing and methodical gunplay is way off, as it's much easier to race through a level spin-jumping at everything in sight than to stop and shoot. Throw in possibly the single most annoying sidekick of all time, Charmy the cretinous bee (only for one level, but it's more than enough), and you've got quite a distressing package.

It's a shame, not only because Sonic Team is a well-respected development house but also because *Shadow The Hedgehog* does contain a few nice ideas.

> "THE HEDGEHOG CONTROLS LIKE BAMBI ON A UNICYCLE. ON ICE. IN A HEADWIND"

There's a good/bad dynamic that is central to the game's structure – your choices during a level will actually affect your path through the story, as your behaviour determines which level you open up next, so there's plenty of scope for repeated play. Whether you'll want to, though, is another matter. In an ideal world the remaining development time will change *Shadow The Hedgehog's* fortunes, redressing the game's balance and ironing out faults. If it turns out to be anything other than a deeply flawed experience, however, we'll be very surprised.



Despite similarities, those expecting a Sonic-quality adventure should beware.


eMag

DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES



"WE ARE FOCUSING ON THE KEY QUALITIES THAT ATTRACT MILLIONS OF FANS TO THE DRIVER BRAND"
CYRIL VOIRON, ATARI EUROPE

■ Carnage, we like. Man walking around outside of car… well, that's not so hot.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

DISCO DRIVER

DRIV3R - LINEARITY x THE SEVENTIES = DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES

■ Hopefully, much of the action will be on the driving side – where it belongs.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Based in Newcastle, Reflections Interactive has been responsible for each progressively worse *Driver* game in the franchise. A long partnership with Atari (and formerly, parent publisher Infogrames) has so far proved immensely profitable for both parties but has yet to yield a decent game. *Driver: Parallel Lines* might change all of that… maybe.

HISTORY

- DRIV3R, MULTI (2004)
- STUNTMAN, MULTI (2002)
- DRIVER 2, MULTI (2000)

A CHANCE FOR REDEMPTION, PERHAPS?

PS2 **Atari, as you may or may not know, is in a fair bit of financial trouble at the moment – so much so in fact, that Infogrames has had to step in to bail the publisher out.** And what do you do when you're in financial difficulty? Why, release another instalment of a successful franchise, of course…

Mystifying as *Driv3r's* astonishing sales were, there's no denying it made Atari a lot of money. Its critical reception, however, was far from warm. The game appalled anyone who came near it with its sheer unforgivable broken-ness. If one game could embody the lamentable taste of the general public when it comes to buying videogames, it would be *Driv3r;* there must have been a lot of disappointed people in the UK, Australia and Europe during the several weeks that it topped the charts.

However, developer Reflections is looking to turn all that around. Possibly. *Driver: Parallel Lines*, the fourth game of the series, should be something considerably different to *Driv3r*. We've been assured a "photo-realistic" representation of New York City to race around and, because the game is to be set in the Seventies, there's been a substantial change of scene too. Although one could be forgiven for thinking that attaching Seventies music to the games would be the only possible way to make *Driver* worse, improvements to the AI, physics and general gameplay structure have also thankfully been guaranteed.

The emphasis in *Driver 4* will be placed squarely back on actual driving – a merciful adjustment, as the boat-based and on-foot sections of *Driv3r* were abominable (anyone remember that port where the character fell halfway through the boat and got stuck there? Or the walking on water? Or the hovering a foot above the deck?). To this end, there will be around 80 cars to find and drive and about four fifths of the game will be driving-based.

The hero of the game this time is a New York tearaway known as 'The Kid' or more commonly, TK (yes, we know…). In his arbitrary battle to become a notorious driver, he'll take part in driving missions around representations of actual New York landmarks… although what these missions will consist of is still under wraps. The game will also feature a number of licensed music tracks – a mainstay for most themed games these days.

Supposedly, *Driver 4* will be less linear than its predecessor in terms of mission structure. Should a mission prove too difficult, or the car AI too clever to avoid being beaten in a chase, the player can take a break and do a few of the optional missions that can be found while wandering around the city. Building up funds, finding new cars and improving existing ones will all garner The Kid enough of an advantage to make the story missions easier.

Although it would appear that genuine effort is being put into *Parallel Lines*, Reflections will have to make a monumental effort to erase the psychological scars left by *Driv3r*. It may have performed well at retail, but the public remembers when it's been stung; if the series is not redeemed with this next instalment, there's no guarantee that Atari will be climbing out of its financial hole any time soon.

"YOU'LL TAKE PART IN DRIVING MISSIONS TAKING PLACE AROUND REPRESENTATIONS OF ACTUAL NEW YORK LANDMARKS"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2, Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Reflections
RELEASE: March '06
GENRE: Action/Racing
PLAYERS: 1 (Online 2-8)

CONCEPT

It's *Driver* again – but this time in the Seventies. Hold your scepticism, though, as we've been promised substantial AI and environment improvements. Not that it could get much worse, admittedly.

TUNE IT UP, BABY

Doing optional missions may lead to new cars and more money, but apparently TK will also be able to tune up existing cars in an in-game garage. Although it's not clear to what extent this feature will be implemented, it's easy to surmise that Reflections is taking a leaf from the books of the successful *Need For Speed* and *Midnight Club* series and offering a wide selection of ways to mod, tune and generally pimp your cars. We may also see a slightly less sophisticated *L.A. Rush*-style automatic improvement system that enhances the performance and appearance of cars without any player-based customisation. Either way, it's good to see more vehicular emphasis in *Parallel Lines*.



Screens like us worry us. The on-foot bits of *Driv3r* were awful – why bring them back?

Sub-missions involving taxis? Oh, how very *GTA* of you.

RIDGE RACER 6



It's incredibly pretty, for sure, but we're not entirely convinced of the game underneath…

"SOMEBODY'S RIGHT ON YOUR TAIL!"

Some – mainly those within the Microsoft camp – may suggest that for an Xbox 360 launch, snatching the rights to a new *Ridge Racer* game is a bit of a coup. It has been, after all, the mainstay of Sony's strategy in the past, with new games in the series playing a part in each of its three launches: PSone, PlayStation2 and PlayStation Portable alike. But then you have to wonder… why didn't Sony put up a fight? Was it purely down to Microsoft having the bigger chequebook? Or does the Japanese juggernaut know something Bill Gates doesn't?

While we're hardly going to insinuate foul play, the hard truth of the matter is that from what we've played of *Ridge Racer 6* it doesn't exactly revolutionise our opinions of the series. In fact, first impressions suggest that Namco has been more than a little cheeky in its creation of the sixth game in the series (or seventh, if you count the PSP version). Why? Because it doesn't seem much more than a revamped take on the handheld game's structure, that's why. From the clean white menus, track and car select screens right through to the races themselves, it all feels so… familiar. That's not necessarily a bad thing considering how much we enjoyed the PSP game, but it's clear that Namco has found a style it feels happy with and intends to stick to, at least for this iteration of the series.

Other elements have also wormed their way from the handheld version into *Ridge Racer 6,* most notably the addition of the Nitrous system… as if *Ridge Racer* needed to be any faster. The more you abuse your ability to powerslide, the faster the three nitrous meters fill up. When one or more is at full capacity, holding down the relevant button (strangely, the R trigger at the moment, although this can be modified) unleashes a further torrent of speed. Interestingly, Namco has tweaked it so that you can use a continual stream from all three tanks as opposed to activating one at a time; we just hope that there are enough places around the tracks to use that much boost.

Of course, the fact that the core gameplay hasn't really evolved much beyond the usual mix of ridiculous sideways powerslides, insanely fast cars and long, winding tracks with multiple routes through each is a mixed blessing. For many the game will come as a relief from all the gimmick-laden racers out there, with its no frills approach and its emphasis on driving skill above all else (or perhaps for the simple fact that it is *Ridge Racer*). Others may be stuck on the sheer simplicity of it when compared to the likes of *Project Gotham Racing 3,* essentially the jewel in the Xbox 360's launch crown.

Regardless, there's no denying that as far as out-and-out arcade racers go, nobody does it better than *Ridge Racer* and as such, we're looking forward to taking the game beyond the time we've spent with it previously. That said however, there's a niggling feeling that the Xbox 360 has been slightly short-changed in its snatching of the series. It definately looks the part, but that just adds to our concerns that a large number of the titles shown so far see style over substance as an acceptable trade-off.

"OBVIOUS GRAPHICAL ENHANCEMENTS ASIDE, IT'S ASTOUNDING HOW MUCH THE GAME FEELS LIKE ITS PORTABLE PREDECESSOR"

START YOUR ONLINE ENGINES

The biggest change to the *Ridge Racer* formula is, without a doubt, the inclusion of Xbox Live compatibility – being able to slide past your friends online, whispering obscenities into their ears as you do so, is something not yet seen in the series. While the relevant press release would suggest that Namco sees such a move as revolutionary is somewhat laughable (perhaps it was living under a rock during the birth of Xbox Live), although we're keen to see how it handles the ability to 'sell' new tracks and cars through Microsoft's Live Marketplace. Considering the cheek it's shown with the design of the game, we wouldn't be surprised to see content already on the disc being made for sale…

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Namco
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 2 December
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1 (2-TBA Online)

CONCEPT

To change *Ridge Racer* would be sacrilegious, or so Namco believes – hence, graphical improvements aside, it's still very much powersliding business as usual on Microsoft's newest console.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Originally founded in 1955 by Masaya Nakamura, Namco has grown to become one of Japan's biggest developers of videogames through the creation of franchises such as *Pac-Man, Tekken* and *Ridge Racer*. In May this year, the company merged with toy manufacturer Bandai to form a new firm, Namco Bandai Holdings Inc.

HISTORY

- **TEKKEN**, 1994 [Arcade]
- **RIDGE RACER**, 1993 [Arcade]
- **PAC-MAN**, 1980 [Arcade]

You can now fire all three turbos in a continuous stream – just don't fly off the road, eh?

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

RACE TO LIVE, LIVE TO RACE

RIDGE RACER (PSP) x 360 + ONLINE = RIDGE RACER 6

"TO COMPLEMENT THE ONLINE COMMUNITY, NEW GAME CONTENT WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE FROM THE XBOX LIVE MARKETPLACE"

NAMCO PRESS RELEASE

DEAD OR ALIVE 4



If Team Ninja's involved, it's no wonder that this is absolutely, ridiculously gorgeous.

KASUMI AND HER FRIENDS BOUNCE BACK

***Dead Or Alive* games have become something of an Xbox console launch tradition, although the team seems to be struggling to get this one finished in time.** *Dead Or Alive 4* wasn't on show at the Tokyo Game Show because, according to the game's producer Tomonobu Itagaki, time spent presenting the game could be better employed working on it. And the team's dedication to visuals and gameplay is evident even at this stage of completion.

Team Ninja was one of only a few developers to get the best out of the Xbox in terms of visuals, with games like *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* and *Ninja Gaiden* remaining two of the best-looking current-gen titles. *DOA4*'s multi-tiered fighting environments showcase amazing attention to detail, from individual falling blossoms to each step on a crumbling staircase. Each also features hazards like electric fences, randomly appearing cars, and falling walls as well as the usual breakable scenery.

The characters are beautiful as ever and among the familiar faces of Christie, Brad Wong and *Ninja Gaiden*'s Ryu Hayabusa are three new ones; a mystery female wrestler, a blonde male named Eliot and Kokoro, a female whose fighting style is the same as that of *Virtua Fighter*'s Akira. The series' flamboyant character style and colour schemes remain intact, but it's the level of detail on clothing that highlights the difference between this and previous *DOA* character visuals.

Most important, though, will be the improvements to the gameplay. Though previous *DOA* games have come nowhere near the fighting complexity of games such as *Virtua Fighter 4*, the developer felt that with an increased online presence, it was time to make some changes. As such, an improved and more sophisticated countering system will make playing *DOA* online a more skilled affair. The fights are also somewhat faster, accentuating the offence-based gameplay of the other titles and providing an excuse to show off the game's impressive motion-blur effects.

So far, the series has failed to sell the Xbox to a Japanese audience but Microsoft is hopeful that this edition will help break ground in the homeland of videogaming. If *Dead Or Alive 4* is this impressive in an unfinished state, we can't wait to see the final version on the X360's Japanese launch date in December.

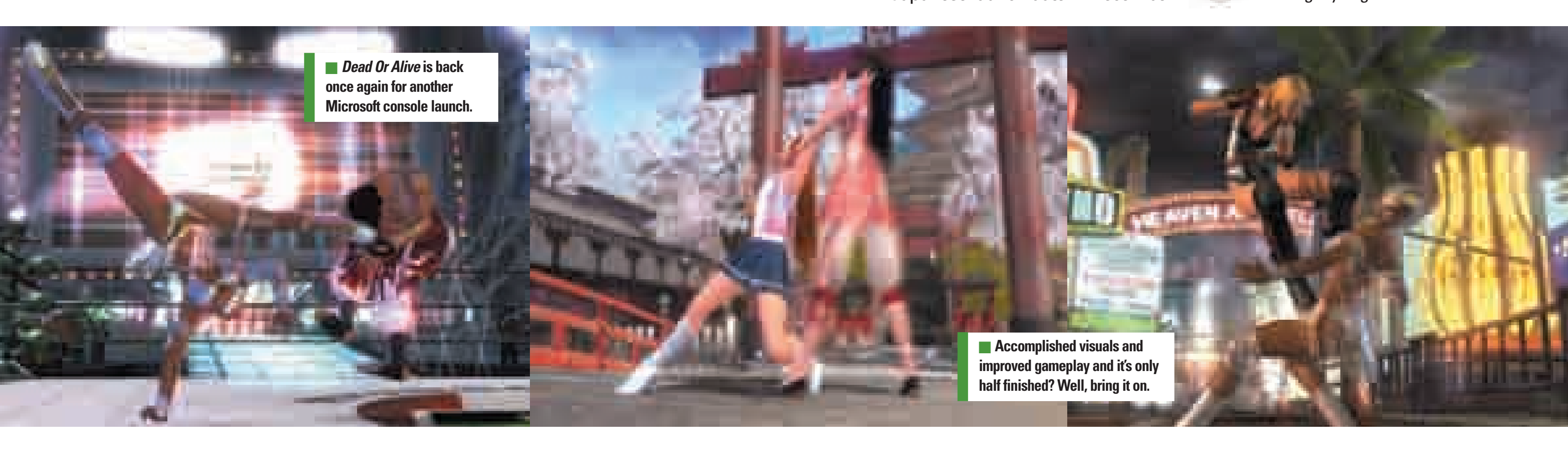
"AN IMPROVED AND MORE SOPHISTICATED COUNTERING SYSTEM ADDS NEW LEVELS OF COMPLEXITY TO THE FIGHTING SYSTEM"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Tecmo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 2 December (Jap: 10 Dec, US: 25 Nov)
GENRE: Beat-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

An improved countering system, more complex fight mechanics… oh, and slightly larger breasts.



Dead Or Alive is back once again for another Microsoft console launch.

Accomplished visuals and improved gameplay and it's only half finished? Well, bring it on.


eMag

AGE OF EMPIRES III


Weather can hamper the progress of your men, so be sure to plan far enough ahead.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Ensemble Studios
RELEASE: 4 November
GENRE: RTS
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Promising 'detail never before seen in RTS', *Age Of Empires III* comes as the long-awaited sequel to the massively successful series.

FROM THE AGE OF CONQUERORS TO THE AGE OF COLONISTS

It's been a long time since *Age Of Empires II* – more than long enough for fans of the series' particular brand of historical strategising to find themselves getting a little impatient and for Creative Assembly to come along and conquer the PC RTS throne with *Rome: Total War*. As such, the game has a challenge on its hands if it's to build sufficiently upon the success of its predecessors to present a valid challenge to Creative Assembly's epic strategy masterpiece.

Historically, *AOE III* picks up where the last game left off: in the 17th Century, based around the conquest of the New World and the eight playable civilisations' battle for supremacy. Naturally, the historical basis for the game's events is included in the form of a mini-encyclopaedia that offers a little insight into the technologies, skills and conquests of the different empires.

Upon starting the game, you could be forgiven for thinking you were looking at *AEO II*. Unsurprisingly, *AOE III* is graphically a great improvement on what we saw back in 1999 and features some pleasing reflection and shadow effects. Compared to *Total War*, however, the game doesn't look as impressive as we'd hoped and despite the graphical improvement, *Age Of Empires III* retains the previous game's look and feel. You could also be forgiven for thinking that you were playing an *Age Of Kings* update, as settlers forage, buildings grow and units charge into battle in much the same way as they did five years ago.

The major difference, of course, is the historical setting. Instead of medieval villagers and knights on horseback, the player is now in charge of musketeers and Industrial Age artillery. The New World aspect also means that the player has

"DESPITE GRAPHICAL IMPROVEMENT, THIS RETAINS THE LOOK OF THE LAST GAME"

contact with a large Home City back in Europe, which can send technological advances, settlers, troops and supplies to aid the colonisation; the better you do out in the Americas, the more prosperous the Home City will become and the more help it can provide.

Though *Age Of Empires III*'s distinct similarity to *Age Of Empires II* in design and gameplay is of slight concern, the differences in setting and character will probably be enough to persuade fans to return to the series. But whether those who were blown away by *Total War* will find this impressive enough to warrant purchase is still in question.


Numbers mean nothing when the opposition has all the horses and cannons…


eMag



TEN YEARS OF DEVELOPMENT IS REALLY STARTING TO PAY OFF…

PREY

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC, Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: 2K Games
DEVELOPER: Human Head Studios/3D Realms
RELEASE: TBA '06
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)

CONCEPT

An incredibly innovative and complex FPS, with looks to die for and a fascinating story – that's *Prey* in a nutshell.

HISTORY

Ten years is an extraordinarily long time for a single game to be in development. Yet, after much reshaping and thought, *Prey* appears to be the game that 3D Realms always wanted.

***Prey* has had one hell of a journey. It's spent a decade in the development doldrums, with countless cannings, resurrections, false promises and disappointments.** However, as 2005 draws to an end and the next generation beckons, *Prey* is back and could very well be the FPS of the year… and it's not even due until sometime in 2006. But then, with ten years of work under its belt, we're pretty sure another six months won't do it any harm.

What strikes you upon seeing *Prey* is astonishing graphics. There's no way this detail and definition would be possible on a current-gen console, making this one of the first batch of PC titles to really look 'next gen'. "*Prey* was conceived as an action-packed FPS with unique gameplay hooks, combined with an interesting main character, and an emotional story," Chris Rhinehart, Human Head's project lead on the game, explains. "We've spent a considerable amount of development time and money on all three of those aspects." No surprises there – *Prey* screams 'big budget' and a glimpse at the incredible opening scene confirms that. You get to watch a typical American bar being torn apart by a marauding alien spaceship, the screen bathed with a haunting neon green glow as bar stools, bar-flies, and the bar itself are ripped from the floor and sucked into the sky. No explanation is offered – the player feels as lost, bewildered and vengeful as the protagonist, Tommy.

It's a cracking opener from a narrative point of view, but the technical issues are equally as impressive; perfect shadows are cast across the pinewood floor, and the physics on show are indiscernible from the real world. Not that we've actually seen a spaceship tear up a bar, of course, but you get the picture. Rhinehart is modest about the technical aspects of the game. "The core physics system is the same as the one in *Doom 3*," he reveals. "In the Roadhouse sequence, you see some physics in action as the alien scout ships invade and tear off the

WEAPON X

With all this talk of genre-redefining level design, it's easy to forget that at its core *Prey* is a meaty FPS. Still, don't expect its weaponry to be any less inventive. "Most of our weapons were designed from the start to be alien and organic," says Rhinehart. "We want players to get the weapons and go 'whoa, this is cool-looking', then experiment with it until they grasp how it works." One look at the bizarre 'spider' bomb is enough to confirm the above statement. It's an explosive device that requires the player to tear each of its legs off and use them as grenades – we don't remember seeing any of those in *Quake*.



PREY

PC/MULTIFORMAT

"THE SETTING OF AN ALIEN SPACECRAFT GIVES US A LOT OF FREE REIGN TO TRY OUT ALL KINDS OF UNIQUE GAMEPLAY THAT COULDN'T BE DONE ON EARTH"

CHRIS RHINEHART, PROJECT LEAD ON PREY



Unfortunately, the aliens in Prey are far from friendly. Or pretty. Or willing to let you get away alive…

roof of the building, and begin pulling up objects and humans from the bar." Physics in action indeed…

No amount of sexy lighting would matter, however, if the gameplay were not up to scratch. Here *Prey* comes into its own. While at first the game might not look particularly original, don't let the *Doom*-esque screens fool you; *Prey* looks

INTELLIGENT LIFE

The creature design is striking to say the least, but they're not just pretty faces; these enemies are highly intelligent. "The AI in *Prey* is dynamically aware of the environment," says Rhinehart. "If you're standing near an explosive pod [which will blow up and do radius damage], the AI will destroy that pod instead of shooting you. If the AI is hurt badly, it'll seek out health, so killing that creature quickly is in your best interest." Hopefully, the AI will match the intelligence of the game's level design and themes. It would be a shame to have such a complex engine wasted on a *Doom*-style combat mechanic.

"A HIGH-CONCEPT MIX OF MIND-MELTING GRAVITATIONAL PUZZLES, BEAUTIFUL GRAPHICS AND INTENSE FPS COMBAT"

to change the face of the FPS. "The setting of an alien spacecraft gives us a lot of free reign to try out all kinds of unique gameplay," Rhinehart enthuses. He's right, of course. *Prey*'s mammoth alien spaceship plays host to some amazing effects, challenging the very notions of movement and space in videogames.

Immediately apparent are the portals that tear the fabric of the game's universe, allowing you to pass through them into other areas. Rhinehart explains: "Portals are rips in space that can connect two previously unconnected areas. They are sort of like very fancy teleporters – only you can see through them, shoot through them, and the destination can have a completely different orientation. So you may run along and jump through a portal, only to find that you're now on the ceiling in another room…" he adds. "Not all portals are obvious – many puzzles throughout the game rely on portals that seamlessly blend into the environment," he explains. "For example, in one part of the game you turn a corner and suddenly see yourself at the end of a corridor. Jump up and down, you'll see yourself doing it. Lob a concussive weapon at yourself, you'll take damage. And if you follow yourself… well, you just end up running in circles." Rhinehart seems very pleased with himself and his confusing product. But rest assured that the team has tested every mind-scrambling moment to death, and the game is just the right side of insane.

Walking on anti-gravity rails takes getting used to, especially when you've got to fight as well.

PREY

PC/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Human Head Studios is a privately owned, independent games development studio based in Madison, Wisconsin. Founded in 1997, the studio began with the development of the award-winning *Rune*. Despite being an accomplished studio in its own right, while working on *Prey* it's had 3D Realms (formally Apogee Software) to lend a hand.

HISTORY

- **DEAD MAN'S HAND**, 2004 [Multi]
- **RUNE: VIKING WARLORD**, 2001 [Multi]
- **THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT**, 2000 [PC]

"GAMERS DO NOT WANT GAMES THAT REHASH CHARACTERS OR GAMEPLAY MECHANICS THEY'VE ALREADY SEEN"

SCOTT MILLER, 3D REALMS

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

PREY SCHOOL

DOOM 3 - HELL + SPACE = PREY

Portals can make for some interesting moments – warping from place to place takes getting used to.





Yes, so you're a Native American – expect pearls of wisdom and some sage advice from your elders.



PUBLISHER PROFILE

Take2 Interactive encompasses many publishing brands, including 2K Games (responsible for *Prey*) and the mighty Rockstar. Take2 also owns peripherals company Joytech, and is responsible for a large chunk of the software you see on the shelves.

HISTORY

- **RED DEAD REVOLVER**, 2004 [Multi]
- **VIETCONG**, 2003 [Multi]
- **SERIOUS SAM**, 2001 [Multi]

No, he's not riding that thing – it's fused onto him at the hips. Cue all manner of rude genital jokes here.

With so much development time under its belt, it's no surprise to see that *Prey* looks absolutely gorgeous.

It seems like an obvious addition, but no other FPS takes advantage of 3D space like *Prey* does.



Taking to the skies in a space craft breaks the action up, although it's no less hectic in its pace.

"THERE'S NO WAY THIS AMOUNT OF DETAIL AND DEFINITION WOULD BE POSSIBLE GIVEN CURRENT-GEN CONSOLE TECHNOLOGY"

Try to think of it in terms of this old tale about early cinema: a piece of film was shown in theatres, depicting a train pulling into a station. Audiences were reportedly so terrified the train would career into the aisles that hundreds of people fled cinemas night after night. It seems laughable now because we've learned to adjust our mindsets but *Prey* asks us to readjust. At first the disorientation might have you sprinting for the nearest copy of *Halo 2* but as you accept *Prey's* unique rules, all becomes clear. "We were concerned it might be too confusing for the player," explains Rhinehart. "Gravity flipping is one example. Originally, gravity flipping was something we experimented with, but once we had it in, we realized that it opened up a ton of interesting puzzle and combat scenarios. The game is full of mind–blowing gravity puzzles in which you have to change how you think about a room and about what is possible in order to solve the puzzle." In an industry screaming out for originality, it would be criminal to chastise *Prey* for pushing back boundaries.

Gameplay is not the only area where the *Prey* team is breaking new ground. Sick of chiselled Caucasians or stereotyped 'gangsta' leads in games? Tommy is a Cherokee Indian. "From the conception of *Prey*, we wanted a unique lead character," explains Scott Miller of 3D Realms. "We chose a Cherokee because their mythology opens the door to several gameplay hooks that we hope will set *Prey* apart from competing games. Players do not want titles that rehash characters or gameplay mechanics they've already seen, so a priority for us is to design games based on original characters. We also wanted to look for ideas that naturally emerge from the unique qualities inherent in those characters." Such forward thinking should be applauded; *Prey* doesn't force a Native American into the lead role to exploit some demographic, or to appeal to a trend in the market – it's a genuine gameplay decision, and one that impacts specifically on the game's mystical elements.

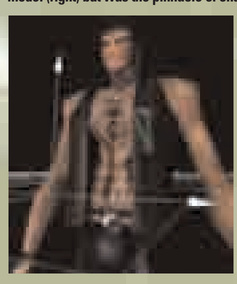
"Tommy's 'powers' tie directly into Cherokee mythology," explains Miller. "We're taking the stance that this mythology is real, but was forgotten as time went on. In *Prey*, Tommy must relearn these ancient beliefs as part of his growth as a character. This isn't easy for him because throughout his life he's grown to despise life on his reservation and wants nothing more than to abandon his heritage, leave the reservation, and lead the life of a white man."

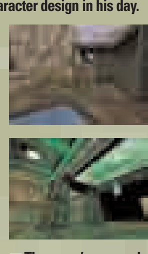
A voyage of self-discovery, in a first-person shooter? *Prey* just keeps on throwing new ideas at the wall… and they keep sticking. No matter which way you view the game, there's little doubt that *Prey* is looking fantastic. A high-concept mix of mind-melting gravitational puzzles, beautiful graphics and intense FPS combat, which genuinely offer gamers something they've never experienced before. Suddenly, 2006 can't come quickly enough…

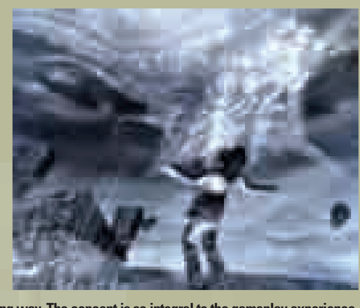
DEVELOPMENT HELL

Prey has certainly had its fair share of trials and tribulations throughout its ten-year development. "The original *Prey* was canned in less than three years because we believed, at that time, that it wasn't going to live up to expectations," admits Miller. "I think *Prey* has benefited from its long time bouncing around in our heads, because the ideas in the game have become well fleshed out. It's very rare for a game to have this length of time to think about, pre-design, and latch onto the best ideas to use."

It's amazing to see how 3D graphics have come on. The original Tommy (below) looks laughable compared to today's model (right) but was the pinnacle of character design in his day.







The game's come a long way. The concept is so integral to the gameplay experience (gravity flipping/portals) and could only be fully realised on next-gen hardware.

SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

ATELIER IRIS: ETERNAL MANA 2

LIKE MANA FROM HEAVEN

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nippon Ichi
Developer: Gust
Genre: RPG
Players: 1



Another day, another world to save from ultimate evil… the lot of your typical RPG hero, it would seem, is not a happy one. Nevertheless, we're pleased that Gust is already near done with the creation of the next chapter in the *Atelier Iris* series (the seventh one, no less), if only because the last game was rather enjoyable. True, it's not an outright sequel to the last adventure – exploring the lands of Eden and Belkhyde as young orphan Felt is as far from Klein Kiesling's quest as you can get in terms of plot – but with the newly crafted gameplay simply adding to, rather than revolutionising the previous exploration and 2D combat, we'll no doubt enjoy ploughing 60-plus hours into this adventure too.

RELEASE: TBA (US: Q1 '06)

EXIT

GET OUTTA HERE, BUB

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Taito
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action Puzzle
Players: 1



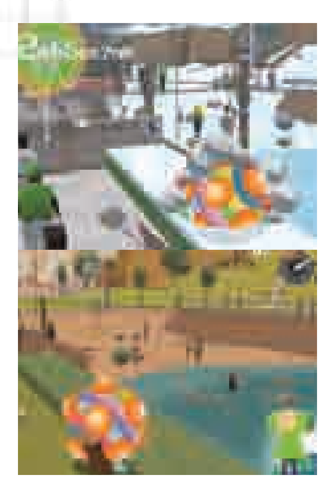
In a sea awash with 'also on PS2!' titles, *Exit* represents something fresh for the PlayStation Portable, if only because it seems like a game specifically designed for the handheld medium. Spread across more than 100 levels of head-scratching platform-puzzle action, the aim is to help Mr ESC (a hero seemingly made out of folded paper, thanks to the cel-shaded visual style) rescue trapped civilians and lead them to safety by collecting keys, opening doors, moving blocks and so on. It's a simple concept but one that seems both fun and devious at the same time, with controlling the movements of the people you save being just as important as the ones you make yourself. Here's hoping for a Western release.

RELEASE: 5 DECEMBER (JAP)

BOKU NO WATASHI NO KATAMARI

ROLL, ROLL, ROLL YOUR BALL…

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Namco
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action Puzzle
Players: 1



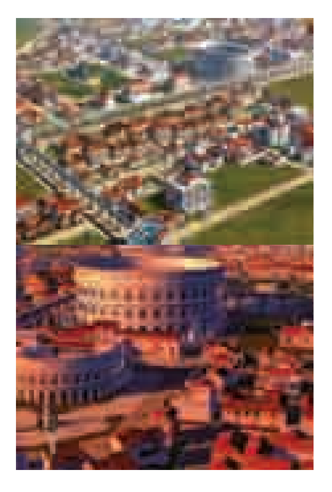
It sounds, in theory, like the perfect combination. The playable excitement that is *Katamari Damacy*, but in portable form thanks to the power of the PSP? Sounds like a winner to us. But then, of course, there's the issue of control, and it's here that this new *Katamari* currently falls down. Mapping the movement of twin analogue sticks to the D-pad and four face buttons respectively, controlling your Katamari feels decidedly sluggish and unresponsive, something that's hardly a plus when the game requires precision movement. Naturally, we're praying this issue is resolved before the game's Christmas release in Japan but considering how close it is to release, we're not expecting much.

RELEASE: 22 DECEMBER (JAP)

CAESAR IV

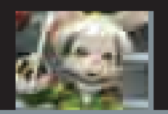
NOW WITH OPTIONAL SALAD

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Tilted Mill
Genre: RTS
Players: 1



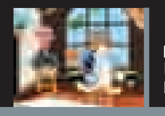
Quite how the *Caesar* series has managed to last so long, we're not sure. Don't get us wrong – it's not a matter of quality, but rather the fact that being set in Roman times under Caesar's rule must limit where you can take the concept. Nevertheless, the fourth game in the series looks set to take full advantage of the massive leaps in graphical technology made in recent years, meaning being able to get right into the heart of your created city shouldn't prove too much of a problem. As your city grows, so too will your political influence as you rise through the ranks of power… but then so will the problems you have to deal with. It's a concept that the *Caesar* series has delivered on in the past, so we have high hopes for this one.

RELEASE: TBA '06



DELAYED – Final Fantasy XII (PS2)

■ A lack of anything at the Tokyo Game Show only heightened our disappointment that Square Enix's next *Final Fantasy* outing won't be appearing until at least the second quarter of 2006.



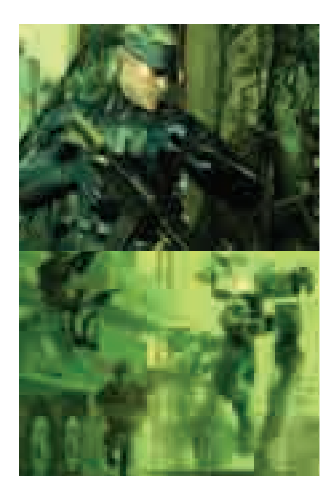
RESURRECTED – Sam And Max 2 (PC)

■ And it's about time too. Having successfully purloined the rights from LucasArts, Telltale Games (a developer made up of ex-LucasArts staff) is set to bring everyone's favourite dog and rabbit back from the grave. Huzzah.

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

PENSION TIME FOR MR SNAKE?

Format: PlayStation3
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: Kojima Productions
Genre: Stealth Adventure
Players: 1



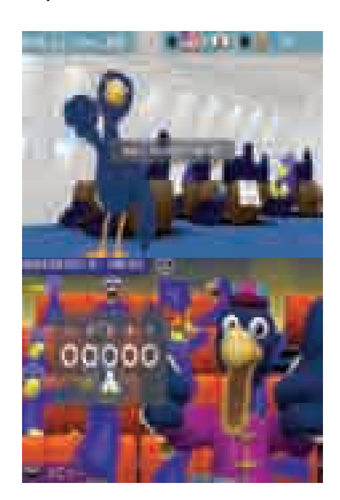
Perhaps it would be rude of us to suggest that Solid Snake now looks more suited to standing in line at the Post Office than fighting on the battlefield. Even so, the onset of old age doesn't appear to have slowed our hero down; indeed, we're already keen to discover the circumstances behind Snake's resurgence since his retirement, as alluded to in the (admittedly impressive) TGS trailer. Undoubtedly though, we're more keen to discover the truth behind the 'in-game footage' that Konami demonstrated… is it real or just more elaborate renders? One obviously hopes it's real, but we've been burned too many times to be overly optimistic. Nevertheless, it certainly whets the appetite for a main course at next year's E3…

RELEASE: TBA (JAP: Q2 '06)

TALKMAN

THE REAL GIFT OF THE GAB

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer: In-House
Genre: Translator
Players: 1



Necessity is the mother of invention, or so we're told, although whether the need to chat up foreign women counts as a real need, we're not sure. Certainly, *Talkman* is slightly more than just a method of getting it on with members of the opposite sex who don't speak your language – operating as an interactive travel-based translator with the added bonus of on-screen visuals to help get your point across, the voice recognition seems to work surprisingly well – but listening to *Talkman's* creator explain the reasoning behind it and seeing some of the phrases in action (Would you like to have coffee with me? Do you have a boyfriend?), we can see the sexual harassment cases forming already…

RELEASE: TBA (JAP: Q1 '06)

FATAL INERTIA

LET'S GET PHYSICS-AL

Format: PlayStation3
Origin: Canada
Publisher: Koei
Developer: Koei Canada
Genre: Racing
Players: 1-TBA



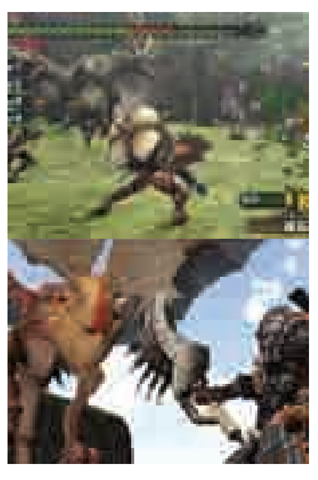
Forget high definition – apparently, the next generation of games consoles is all about the physics. That it's Koei that appears to be leading the charge on that front, however, seems somewhat surprising; rather than simply offering prettier visuals, *Fatal Inertia* does at least appear to add something to the genre it represents. This is mostly through interaction between your weapons (which react differently according to how you use them) and the landscape, which is promised to be deformable. Summoning a landslide to block your opponent? Opening new paths? All apparently possible. Whether the '*Wipeout* meets *Mario Kart'* formula works to that end remains to be seen, but the possibilities are certainly there.

RELEASE: TBA (JAP: Q1 '06)

MONSTER HUNTER PORTABLE

'SHHH – BE WERY, WERY QWIET'

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House
Genre: RPG
Players: 1 (2-4 Wi-Fi)



It might have been an incredibly simple context, but *Monster Hunter* on the PS2 gripped us for what seemed like an age. All that wilderness, filled with monsters to slay with our bare hands for no reason other than to satisfy the needs of others… it's so primeval. Of course, we never dreamed that Capcom would be able to, so competently, condense the action onto the PSP, but it's done it – looking visually impressive and offering multiplayer expeditions (albeit over Wi-Fi rather than online, sadly) alongside the single-player adventure, some of us are already sharpening our swords in anticipation. A little balancing over the PS2 version, perhaps, and Capcom will have another winner on its hands.

RELEASE: 12 DECEMBER (JAP)


POW
CHARGE



Raizing hell, Capcom style **1944: The Loop Master, Arcade (Capcom) 2000**


play
scho





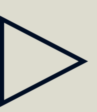


Computer games often get a bad press from 'responsible adults'. They're seen by some as an unwelcome distraction, unsuitable for school, and a poison for young, fresh minds. And there are the murder cases – however unfair – linked to videogames which are used to back up these arguments, not to mention the reports of deaths as a result of playing games for up to 50 hours virtually non-stop. But there is a bright light looming on the horizon. Using videogames as an effective educational tool in classrooms across the nation could actually be good for children.

The battle to encourage computer games as a legitimate teaching tool is reminiscent of Dewey Finn's attempts to introduce rock music into a top college in the movie *School Of Rock*. The character, played by comedian Jack Black, was surprised at how quickly his straight-laced pupils took to the idea, but he knew all along that teachers and parents would be angry at his departure from the school's curriculum. Yet he could barely contain his excitement, and forged ahead regardless – resulting in pupils that expressed themselves in ways that had not previously been allowed, and even enjoyed the learning process. The film showed that education need not be confined to books. By harnessing fresh ways of teaching, children can gain far more from the experience than traditional teaching methods alone provide.

So what are parents and teachers to make of EA's new project to productively use videogames in the classroom? The software house has teamed up with lottery-funded education organisation Futurelab to pilot a new scheme in four UK schools, three of which are part of the British education system, and one a German school in London.

The project, which began in September, is focusing on how commercial games can be used in schools. Instead of using dedicated educational software, EA wants to see if blockbuster hits such as *The Sims*, *Civilization* or *Age Of Empires* can succeed in encouraging pupils to learn. The study will look at what children can pick up from computer games, how best to introduce games into the classroom, and what changes might be required to make them relevant to an educational environment.



Give Granny A Kiss...



Videogames in the classroom used to mean one thing – edutainment. As dirty a word to gamers as any you're likely to hear, edutainment titles were usually just an excuse to fit popular characters like Mario into pitiful attempts to 'teach the kids'. However, if you were at school during the Eighties, you'd probably remember the most famous educational game ever created: *Granny's Garden*. Why it has earned such a cult following, no one really knows; the original 1983 BBC Micro version was often frustrating and random in places, although there's no doubt the witch was scary when she popped up in her blue, hook-nosed glory. What's more bizarre, however, is that the game is still used in schools today, albeit in a remade Windows format. Much as we love nostalgia even we couldn't justify spending £35 to bring back those memories... emulation, anyone?



Brain Power

"We know that games offer plenty of intellectual challenge and stimulation," says Claus Due, market development manager for EA Europe. "It seems sensible for the education sector and games industry to come together to look more closely at ways of co-operating." The results of this research project, called Teaching With Games, will be known in August 2006. The year-long study will investigate attitudes of educators and students toward games, and their use in the classroom. It is hoped that the results will contribute to the development of future educational computer games. "We entered into this project with Futurelab as we believe that children can and already do learn a lot through computer games," added Due. He says, "EA recognises that interactive computer games engage the brain like no other media, and we're keen to see how this can be applied to learning."

Of course, computers in classrooms is not new; the practice extends back over 20 years. BBC computers were as much a feature of schools as chalk and blackboards, and children pestered parents for a computer – usually a Spectrum, Commodore 64 or Amstrad – on the grounds that it would help them with their schoolwork, and allow them to keep up with their 'equally studious' class colleagues. However, the extent of that schoolwork tended to be a few blasts of *Skool Daze* or *Jet Set Willy*, and parents soon came to realise this. At the same time, software houses were attempting to marry children's love of games with education, believing videogames to be an ideal way of encouraging pupils to learn. Whether it be simple reading, writing and spelling, or a few exercises in maths, software developers have long since tried to harness the power of computers to make it appear to children that they're learning while having fun. Parents snap up these educational titles believing them to be the antidote to little Johnny's infatuation with *Space Invaders*.

There has been varying success for education software producers. Database came up with a great range of Fun School products in the late Eighties and early Nineties, as did Bourne Educational Software with programs such as the *Timeman* series which taught children how to tell the time and set a clock. These were often easy to use, being nothing more than pressing the space bar or 'Enter' key. Some were so simple, they were mostly written using BASIC. Yet no matter how they were put together, all programmers of such titles faced the same problems. In the first instance, they had to get a child motivated to learn. Most succeeded in doing this through the use of graphics: for younger pupils a colourful display of bright, attention-grabbing pictures seemed to do the trick. Add to that a bouncy tune, and the kids were hopefully half way to getting an education.

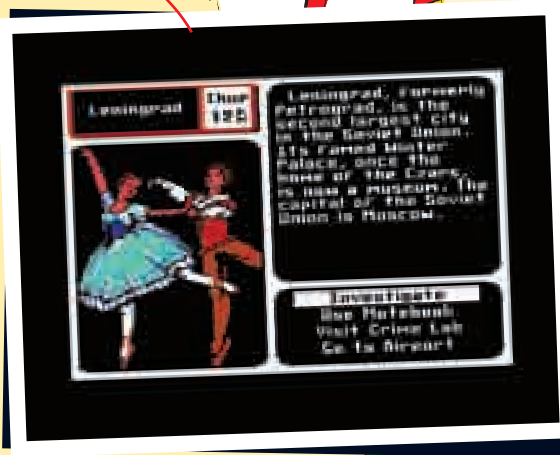


Children have short attention spans, so the makers of educational software have tended to create short games which offer frequent rewards. On top of that, the developers have had to think about whether the difficulty level is being pitched to the abilities of the intended user. All in all, it's a hard task to get right.



The Sims 2 versus Where In The World Is Carman Sandiego... we know which one we'd rather play.







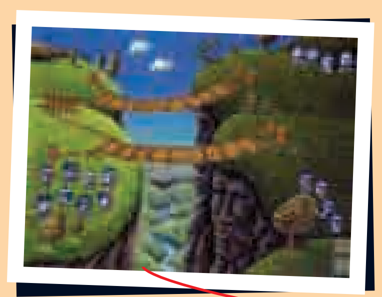
The success of such packages should not be ignored though. The Fun School series sold in excess of 300,000 copies, and was named Best Home Educational Package at the European Computer Trade Show in the early Nineties. Fun School's software closely followed the National Curriculum, and created a hybrid of entertainment and education targeting specific age groups. So could EA and Futurelab just take a game you can pick off the shelf in any computer shop, and make it work as a tool of education?

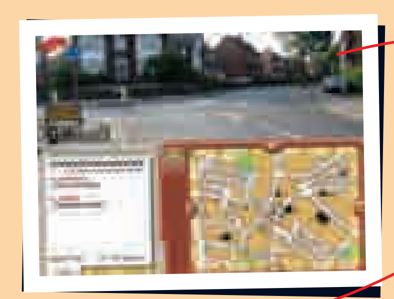
Annika Small, managing director at Futurelab, believes so. "There has been a lot of interest in using computer games for learning," she says, "but to date no one has really investigated what young people might be able to learn from games, and how they might best be introduced in schools. We propose to do this by working closely with teachers and students to design new support materials for use with commercial games. We will evaluate the success of these materials, and identify aspects of games that developers could make more relevant to an educational environment."

Into Practice

Teachers at the four schools involved in the trial will be able to pick and choose their own games. Whether that means *The Sims* could one day be on the National Curriculum remains to be seen. However, one game already being used in classrooms is its precursor *Sim City* – the games allows you to create a residential, commercial and industrial metropolis. It has already been critically acclaimed by gamers and teachers, and it's easy to see the educational benefits. In *Sim City*, you are in control – of the budget, police, fire service, hospitals, power and water. It's brilliant for would-be town planners.

At Fair View Junior School in Gillingham, Kent, teachers have used the game to teach pupils about urban planning issues. They used a special version adapted for the towns of Gillingham, Chatham and Rochester that included recognisable local landmarks. It encouraged pupils to recreate their home town, letting their creativity run free, while at the same time getting to grips with transport and environmental issues. The game was included as part of a four-day course called Design A Town run in schools by Medway Children's University. "We wanted to see if it was feasible to use games software in schools for purposeful learning," says the university's manager, Teresa Murphy.





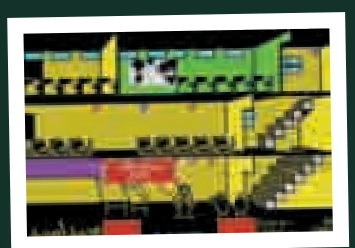
Current edutainment games like Map Detectives or The Logical Adventure of the Zoombinis teach, but aren't much fun as games.

High School Games



Skool Daze - Microsphere

You play Eric, a less-than-academic pupil who – worried what his parents will think – decides to swap his bad report card with a fake good one. The card is placed in the school safe and to open it you have to find the right combination. Yet whizzing around the school and firing your catapult at random people was more fun – as was punching the odd teacher or two.



Combat School – Ocean

Think you can play this game without experiencing some pain? Forget it. As hard as any intense PE session, the running events of *Combat School* had you waggling the joystick like your repetitive strain injury depended on it. It was an amazing-looking game that had you competing in an assault course, an iron man race, arm wrestling, three firing races, and a scrap with your instructor.



Grange Hill – Argus Press

The infamous London school was a hit for Argus Press in 1987, but it was a bad mix of action and a text-based adventure game. The storyline saw you play Gonch whose walkman was confiscated by a teacher. Together with his pal Hollo, he decides to break into the school and get it back. You then wander around, picking things up and talking to people. But the best bit of all was the cool theme tune.



"Games are still primarily for males"

Similar headway is being made by Tim Rylands, a teacher at Chew Magna Primary School in Bristol. He won this year's British Educational Communications and Technology Agency award for Best Use Of Technology In A Primary School. He uses computer game stills to inspire creative, descriptive writing, and he plays *Myst* with the children, asking them to make decisions so that they solve the puzzles as a class. He says:,"I hope the way I use my ICT is invisible. I try to get children to use whatever programme they're using in a way that the technology is not as important as the way they use it to communicate."

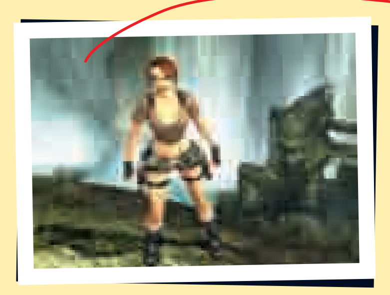
That said, there are many who want to go even further. Leading academic Caroline Pelletier believes games should not only be used as educational tools alongside books and documentaries, but should also be stripped down and analysed. Pupils have studied literature and films, now it's time to apply the same principle to videogames. Pelletier is managing a project at London University's Institute of Education looking into how game creation can be taught in schools. "I know using games in the classroom as a visual way of capturing pupils' imaginations is being tried out in schools," she says. "But it depends so much on how it is done. What I want to do is see how students can learn to make their own videogames so they can become producers as well as consumers of games."

Last October, researchers at the Institute of Education's Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media, carried out two projects, one of which looked at integrating games into media education. As a result they've been working with Oxford-based software house Immersive Education to develop games-authoring software for use by pupils. "My work involves analysing digital and non-digital games and seeing how they are constructed, what makes them motivating to play, and how games function as forms of communication – what they can say, what arguments they can make, what young people might express in their game designs," Pelletier says."This has proved a very productive activity in several schools, with students learning about the complexities of game designs, and how to describe them."

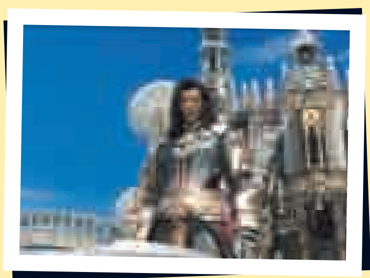
This could all lead to *Doom*, *Tomb Raider* or *Final Fantasy* being critically analysed in the future, just before pupils attempt to create their own version.



Is this activity destined to become a boys-only domain to the exclusion of the fairer sex? Such a debate is already roaring. Another project carried out by the Institute looked at the motivation and pleasure that games provide children with, and gave an insight into gender issues in games literacy. Research fellow Diane Carr says that using videogames in the classroom would encourage more and more girls to pick up games by making them more accessible to both genders. At the moment, she says, girls lack first-hand experience of how much fun games can be, and that leaves them with little motivation to play, keeping them disengaged from an engrossing and sociable activity. "As it currently stands, the majority of computer games are still produced by a primarily male industry, one that tends to assume a male audience. They are sold in retail outlets where men outnumber women on both sides of the counter. Women and girls do actually play a lot more videogames than is usually assumed and computer games themselves are a lot more diverse than discussions on girls and games usually tend to admit." And yet all of this could well lead to accusations that children having access to videogames



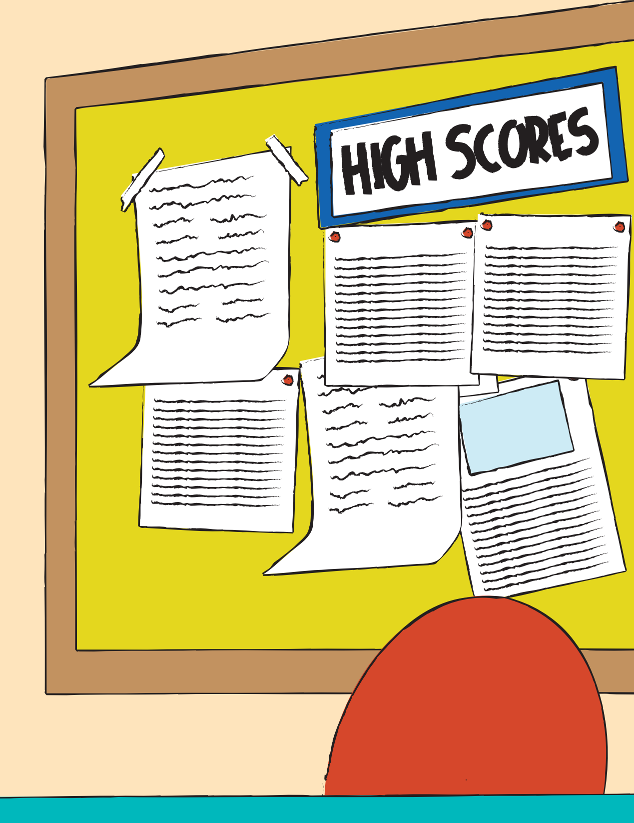
Lara Croft – strong female role model for young kids or the kind of woman that your mother warned you about?





Will Wright's upcoming game Spore would be a perfect tool for allowing children to use their imaginations.



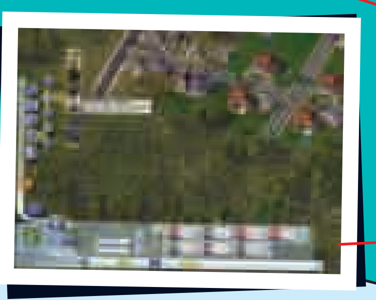


at school is another sign of the dumbing down of education.

Dr Andrew Burn, associate director of the Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media, disagrees. "We want to reassure anxious parents and teachers that games are a legitimate cultural form," he explains, "one that deserves critical analysis in schools just as film, television and literature do. We also want to argue that full understanding only comes when children have the tools to create their own games." The aim is to get videogames on a par with other media in the classroom. Movies and books have long been established in schools, with teachers frequently backing up a reading of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* by letting the children watch it being acted out on the small screen. Not only is it cheaper than a trip to the theatre, but it also cements the story in pupils minds, and adds variety to a lesson.

In science, teachers often put on rather dull videos during a lesson to explain the finer points of particular subjects. But if Electronic Arts gets its way, games will be used alongside movies and books. The three media are already becoming intrinsically linked. Vivendi Universal Games has struck a deal to publish games based on author Robert Ludlum's books. The best-selling writer's novels, including *The Bourne*

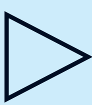




Myst's mental benefits are obvious, while the planning side of Sim City lets children use strategy to help them learn

Identity and *The Bourne Supremacy*, have already been turned into films starring Matt Damon. Turning books into games shows how the gaming industry is seamlessly slotting into the wider picture. Yet science is still an area which really could benefit from computer game intervention in lessons. All those Open University-style programmes were hardly inspiring, and only proved a talking point due to the ghastly side burns and Paisley flares worn by the majority of the presenters. Using computers games could revolutionise lessons.

And which game could be the one to step forward and take its place in this bold, new world? According to Alan Carpenter, creative director for 3T Productions, an interactive media design and development company, Will Wright's upcoming game *Spore* could prove ideal. *Spore* is a simulation game which allows players to develop a creature from the humble beginnings of a micro-organism. As time goes on, the creature evolves and then interacts with its environment; mating and laying eggs, and building up intelligence. You then create a city populated by a mix of creatures before rapidly expanding, jumping into vehicles and eventually going on to populate other planets. "*Spore* is a good example of a game with educational potential. It's task-driven but with multiple ways of achieving your aim. There's going to be a depth of experience which will bring with it a greater potential for learning, retaining information and understanding complex concepts through trial and error," Carpenter enthuses. "I imagine that with a little modification, the early stages of the game could serve as a science exercise on a theme such as micro-



Bully For You

Of course, there's one game unlikely to make it into the classroom – Rockstar's latest controversial title, *Bully*. Anti-bullying campaigners are incensed that the game apparently has players willingly hurting other pupils in a school while punches and kicks fly around with very little thought.

And even before it hits the shelves, there are calls for it to be banned as fears grow over the game's possible influence on children. Rockstar says *Bully* is groundbreaking and innovative, with original gameplay and humorous tongue-in-cheek storytelling, but Liz Carnell director of Bullying Online argues, "We don't feel bullying is a suitable topic for a game because we are contacted by up to four suicidal children a day, and there's nothing amusing about the terrible distress they feel."



"A greater potential for learning"

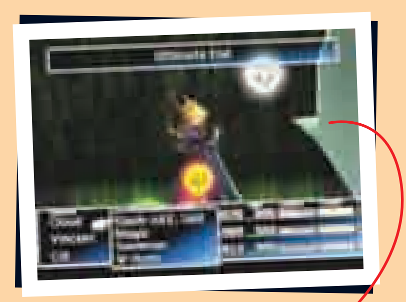
organisms. Through experimentation, students would be asked to make observations, draw conclusions and suggest explanations for these by demonstrating scientific knowledge that has been gained."

Carpenter's company 3T is about to launch its own educational title, *Sonica Spanish*, which aims to teach the language via a number of gaming methods. He likens the game to a collection of mini-games seen in titles such as *Mario 64 DS*. This modern foreign language package is aimed at primary school children and, according to the makers, "pushes the boundaries of kinaesthetic learning," using 240 activities ranging from interactive games, dance mat activities and karaoke, to word-to-picture matching games, conveyor belt memory games, and target shooting. It builds on the other 3T titles including *Maths Alive* and *Discover Alive*. "Gaming has been introduced by stealth into learning content until more recently," Carpenter says. "Now there's not a games or education conference without a session on the meeting of both industries. It's a very exciting time ahead. It's important to discuss barriers which need to be broken down in order for both industries to work successfully together."

Edutainment?

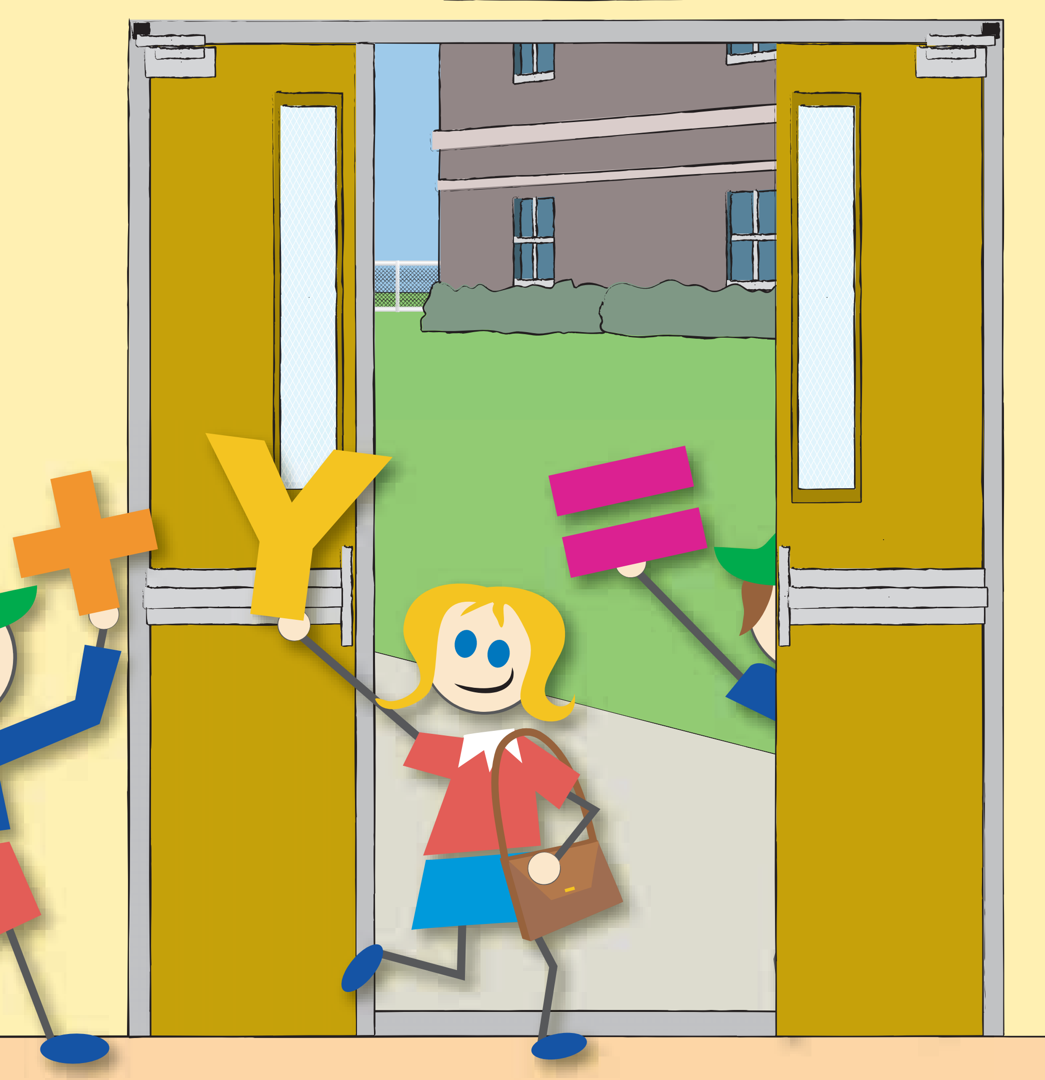
The *Sonica Spanish* game moves learning on from the packages of old, and embraces newer technologies such as the dance mat. Through the use of repetition and typical dance mat gameplay, students are required to view words or images displayed on screen, and identify them correctly by stepping on the corresponding pad on the mat. According to 3T, the use of the dance mat has improved the speed of acquisition and long-term retention of Spanish. The firm concludes that the adoption of commercial gameplay, coupled with the use of the dance mat, motivates and enthuses students to engage with the game without feeling that it is a compulsory chore.

Although *Sonica Spanish* is geared specifically to an educational market, Carpenter feels that mainstream games can also be beneficial. "The context and mode of use has to be appropriate," he says. "I believe that the off-the-shelf games with the



Though not exactly likely in the near future, it may not be that long until the educational benefits of games like Doom or Final Fantasy are realised...

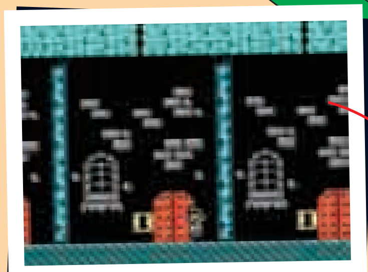




greatest educational value tend to be those of a more open-ended nature with a large number of variables and parameters to experiment with. Relatively linear games such as *Medal Of Honor* focus more on action and set pieces, and are less practical for students to interact with in any great depth, so they tend to be 'quick hits'. But even then, they can be used as an excellent classroom 'starter' to set the scene for a subject such as history. "I strongly believe that the ideal and most effective educational game would be designed for this very purpose at the outset, and from the ground up," he stresses. "One of the biggest factors that determines whether a teacher will choose to incorporate content into a lesson is its fitness for purpose. Given the pressures to spend time on tasks, it's important for teachers to draw on content that clearly focuses on the learning outcome they intend to achieve. If a teacher finds it difficult to see the relevance of a particular game in the context of the curriculum, it is likely to be deemed inappropriate." Carpenter admits that, "mainstream games are obviously entertainment driven, which can often result in inaccuracies in content and aspects of gameplay that are perceived as padding or superfluous to requirement." And yet despite all the arguments over whether or not games should be integrated into the school curriculum, the most important thing is convincing the Government. That, for the moment at least, could be tricky.

A spokesman for the Department for Education and Skills, headed by education secretary Ruth Kelly, remains unsure that using games in schools is a good idea, and told **games**™, "We are sceptical about the benefit of computer games that are not designed as educational tools. Certainly games that are designed as learning tools can be effective – for example games that help children to read or add up – but the most effective thing for developing children's reading, writing and maths skills is a good teacher." Despite this probably being true, it seems videogames will be playing a far larger part in the education of future generations whether we like it or not. That's progress for you we guess – we were just born a little bit too early. 





The days of using popular icons in low quality edutainment 'games' such as Mario Is Missing are thankfully long gone...



The Players

YOU HAVE A NEXT-GEN OFFERING ON THE HORIZON – YOU'RE ENTITLED TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT GAME CONTENT, BUT ARTIST DAVID CHEONG IS KEENER THAN MOST TO ENSURE THE STYLE AND ARTISTRY WE DESERVE IS PART OF THE PACKAGE…

DAVID CHEONG

RELIC ENTERTAINMENT

It's always good to talk to the people responsible for creating the games we play, but it's often the case that the higher up the ladder you go to get the information you're after, the more likely you are to come away with a heap of words that sound suspiciously like they've been inserted into the interviewee's head by a PR person. That's why we're delighted to have the opportunity to chat with Relic Entertainment artist David Cheong; there is not a corporate line in sight, but a true passion for the feel and content of games is obvious…

"I was classically trained in fine art and I took animation at college," Cheong begins. "I do come at videogames from a fine art direction, though." We imagine it must be tough squeezing substance into games when some publishers simply push for 'me too' titles and speedy money-spinners. "Well, what I look out for are games that have a certain character and style," he continues. "I've just finished playing *Destroy All Humans!* and I loved it. I mean, it's great to play and it's set in the Fifties – the style is great. Having that kind of art direction really appeals to me. As far as influences go, I find a lot of mine in films and animation – especially Japanese animation." This isn't surprising, especially when you consider his role at Relic, but then Cheong displays more passion for the artistry of products than most we've met in the past, so we decide to discover his favourites… "I'm old-school in that respect," he admits. "The pinnacle of Japanese cartoons for me – and it's telling of my age a bit – was *Star Blazers*. It's the only time I got up at six in the morning just to watch a cartoon."

We're surprised. As previously mentioned, he's certainly not the first developer we've come across who draws influence from Japanese animation, but most tend to yell the words 'Princess Mononoke' at us at for a while. "I do love Miyazaki films," he admits. "But I've only seen as far as *Spirited Away*. I haven't had a chance to catch that 'somebody's moving castle' one."

This appreciation for the art contained within games is certainly refreshing, and it immediately strikes us that Cheong would be the perfect person to quiz on the 'style over substance' debate that's been raging on in one form or another since games like *Myst* started cropping up. "I don't even see *Myst* as a game," Cheong says bluntly. "It's more like a toy – an art toy. For me a game is something that actually requires game designers to create mechanics. *Myst* could be created by art alone. A real game is something that has dynamics, rules and an internal structure that propels the vision of the art. That's where I make the distinction."

Of course, it's likely that with the introduction of next-gen machines, the line between the two will become blurred, and it seems that we will be given the best of both worlds. Cheong agrees fully, "It's really exciting," he says. "With all the next-gen software the graphics are amazing, but the bonus is, they are all actually proper games as well. The situation now is that the level of detail is on a par with pre-rendered computer graphics from the early Nineties, and it's only going to get better."

Of course, Relic has a great interest in the next-gen market, as its current project *The Outfit* will be launching early next year. And as if he needed to prove his point concerning next-gen graphics to us, he fires up a demo and, sure enough, *The Outfit* currently looks stunning. He certainly seems more than pleased with the way it's turning out, and tells us with a wide grin that, "Everything is finally locking into place," but where does he see the next-generation machines heading once all the 'oohs' and 'ahhs' over pretty visuals have died away? "My vision for the next couple of years is that next-gen games are going to focus on photo-realism," he tells us. "They have the graphical strength to do that, and everybody wants to exploit this power. Also, as the hardware matures, you're going to see more risks taken with art direction. It happened with both the GameCube and PlayStation2 before. At first it's all graphics, but eventually people get used to fancy looks, and new ideas start to surface. That's the time I'm really looking forward to…"

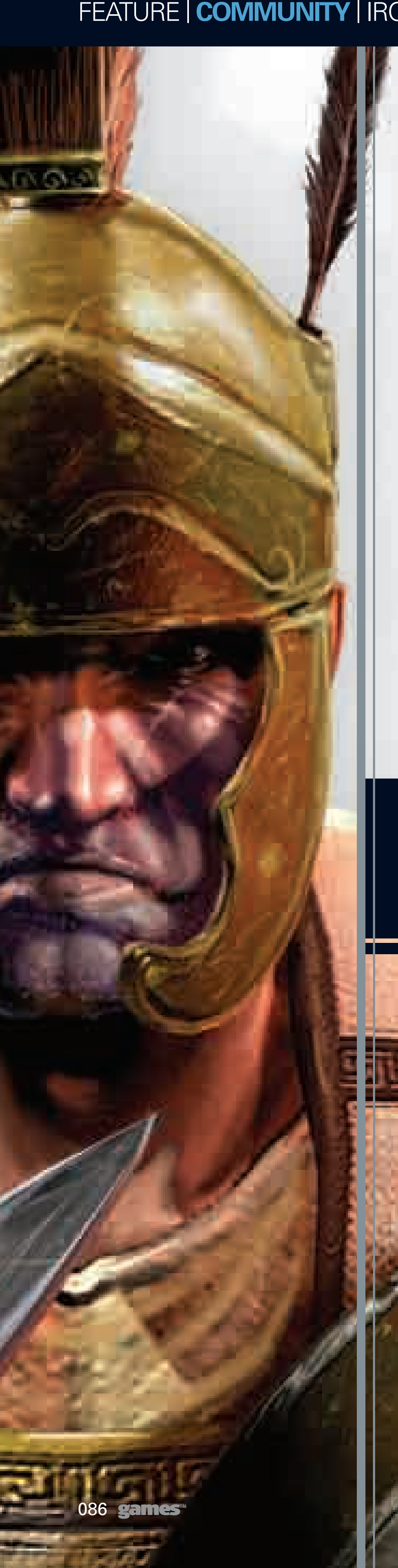
The Outfit *is out Q1 '06 on Xbox 360 and was previewed in issue 32.*

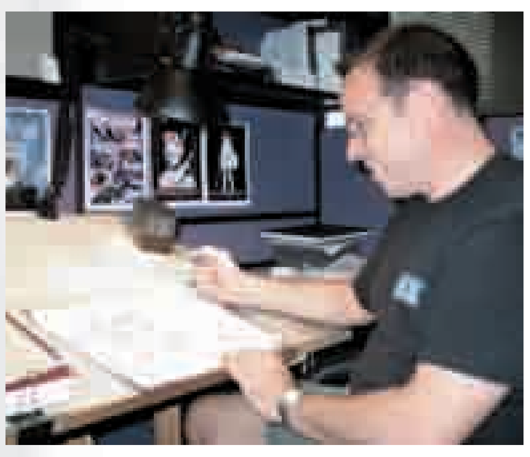


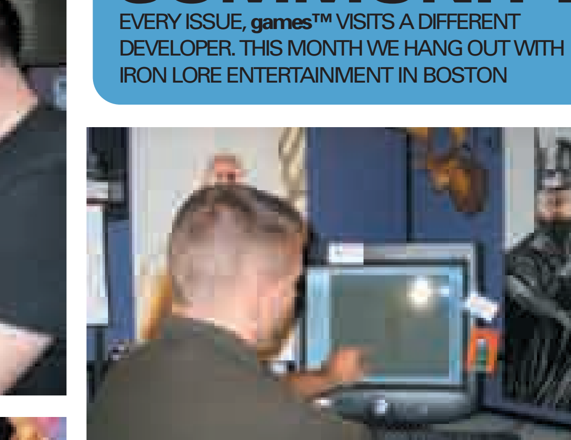
"THE PINNACLE OF JAPANESE CARTOONS FOR ME – AND IT'S TELLING OF MY AGE A BIT – WAS STAR BLAZERS"
DAVID CHEONG

COMMUNITY

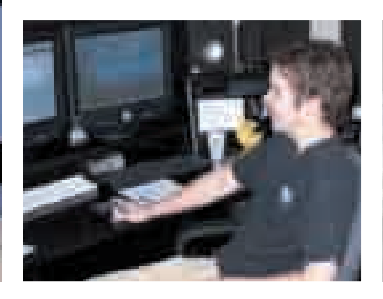
EVERY ISSUE, games™ VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH WE HANG OUT WITH IRON LORE ENTERTAINMENT IN BOSTON

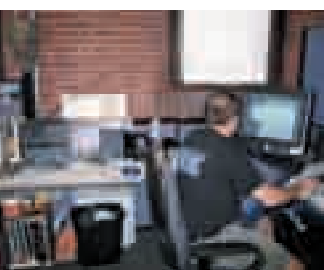






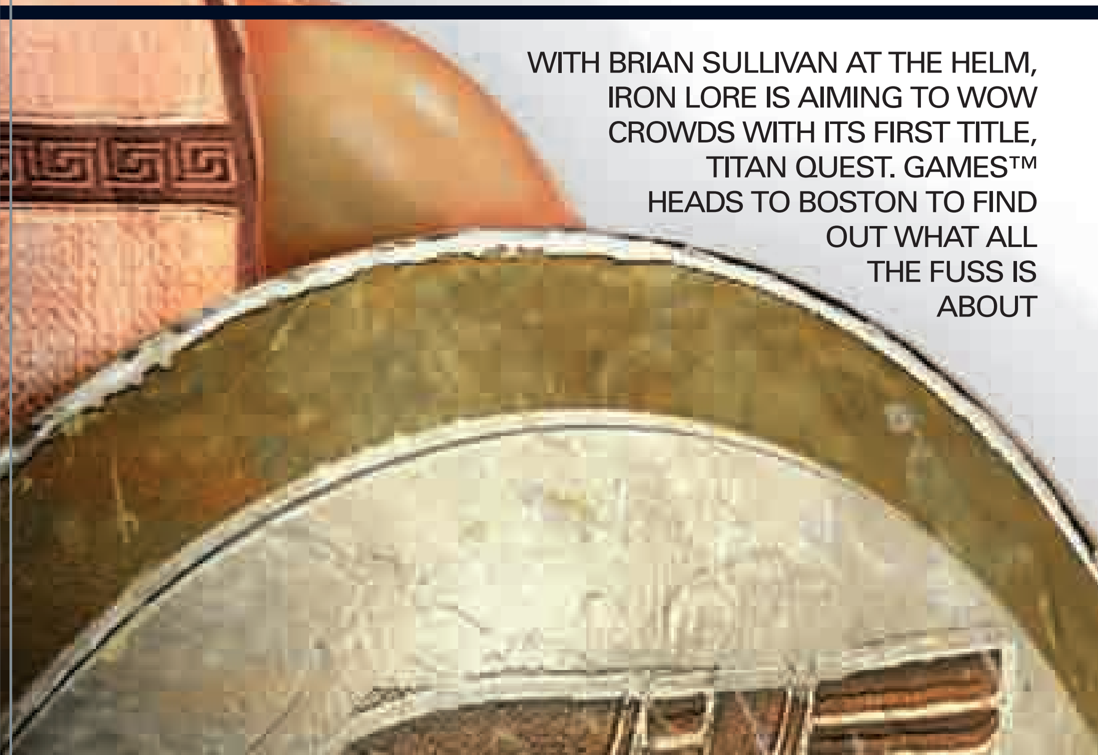






IRON LORE

WITH BRIAN SULLIVAN AT THE HELM, IRON LORE IS AIMING TO WOW CROWDS WITH ITS FIRST TITLE, TITAN QUEST. GAMES™ HEADS TO BOSTON TO FIND OUT WHAT ALL THE FUSS IS ABOUT



WHO'S WHO

1 RICH SULLIVAN, SENIOR ARTIST
IN A NUTSHELL: Lead creative artist who has plenty of experience in design. Anyone remember a little thing called *Hulkamania*? This is the man you have to thank for that logo.

2 BRIAN SULLIVAN, CO-FOUNDER
IN A NUTSHELL: Co-founder and president of Iron Lore, Brian Sullivan is best known for the creation of the *Age Of Empires* series while he was with Ensemble.

01

02

ENTERTAINMENT

There are many things to do in Boston. Aside from the usual tourist traps such as the original Cheers bar (where, incidentally, nobody knew our name), and an essential tour around New England, catching a Red Sox game was the most appealing plan. Unfortunately, this was only until our scheduled match was washed away by a ludicrous amount of rain, and suddenly, purchasing sweaters emblazoned with the word 'Harvard' had to do. Of course, trading dollars for attire associated with a university we'd never attended wasn't the reason for the trip – instead, a visit to Iron Lore Entertainment, developer of the upcoming PC title *Titan Quest*, was high on our 'to do' list.

A large industrial-looking building is what greeted us, chimneys jutted from the roof and, once inside, we noticed various bits of machinery hanging from the ceiling that we had no clue as to the purpose of – we immediately assumed Iron Lore used these to control some sort of portcullis/drawbridge combo. "It used to be a textile mill," Brian Sullivan, president of Iron Lore informs us, successfully destroying our fantastic vision. "Down in Dallas it's far more modern, and all the office buildings are made of glass and steel. Places like this have a little more character, and I kinda like them better." Of course, although the architecture may not have been to his tastes, Brian's time in Dallas was well spent, and it was there that he co-founded Ensemble Studios. "That was back in 1995," he remembers, "and the studio was made up of a number of my childhood friends. None of us had really done anything in the games industry before, we just all quit our jobs because we thought we had some good ideas – it's amazing that we came up with a decent product really."

The product that he's referring to is the highly acclaimed *Age Of Empires*, a series



"WE'RE NOT TRYING TO BE ACCURATE, WE'RE JUST TRYING TO MEET PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS"
BRIAN SULLIVAN, IRON LORE



Naturally, the wealth of mythologies offered by *Titan Quest*'s setting affords Iron Lore a considerable amount of luxury when it comes to the creation of its monsters – from minotaurs and hydra to gorgons, centaurs and more, it's an incredible lively world out there…

that has run for coming up to nine years now, and there's no denying that the experience that Brian obtained while working on these games is now proving to be invaluable to his most recent project, *Titan Quest*. "We are all big history fans and are working on a very historical game, so our influences have to be history and myth," he says. "I've already worked a lot in this area, so I have a good advantage. Fortunately there's been a resurgence of historical epics such as *Gladiator* and *Troy* recently, so there's a lot of interest in what we're currently doing. I don't need to tell you that that's very good news for us."

Taking place in ancient Greece and Egypt, *Titan Quest* is an action RPG featuring creatures and characters that have been ripped straight from the mythology of both cultures. This means that history and monster buffs stand to be in for a real treat. However, due to the content, this is to be a slightly different experience to *Age Of Empires* in more than just genre; where *Age Of Empires*' historical accuracy managed to win it a place in some classrooms, *Titan Quest* is more

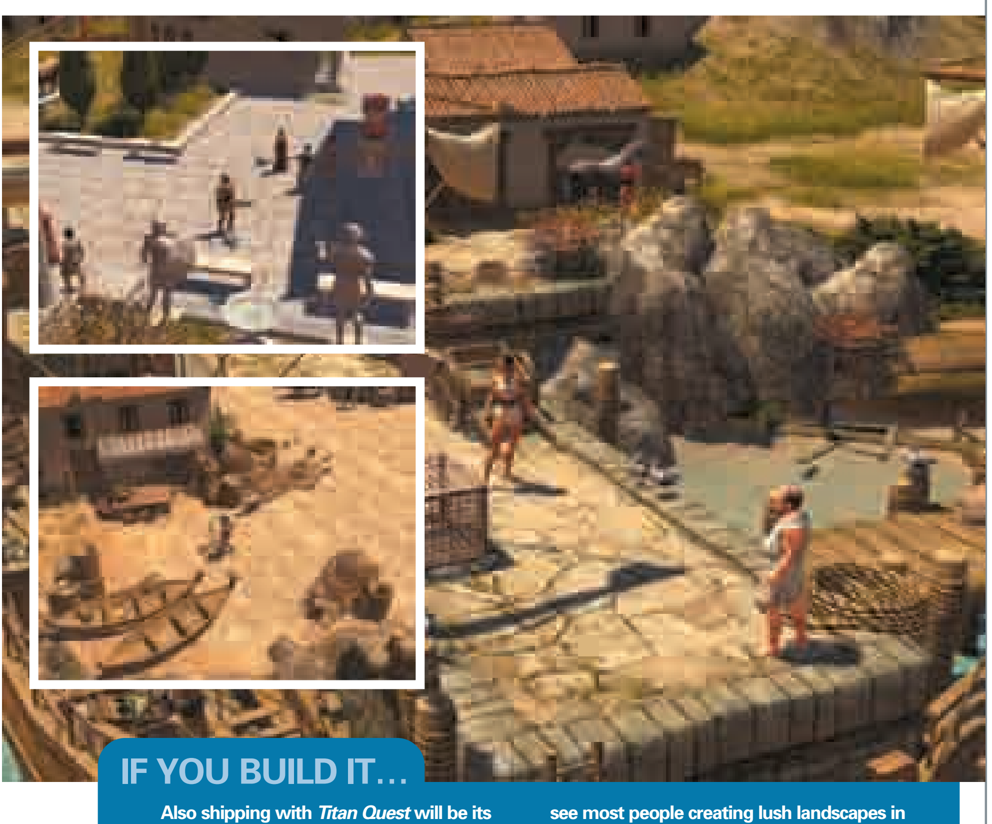
> "IT'S **AMAZING HOW MANY** AMERICANS **DON'T KNOW ANYTHING** ABOUT HISTORY"
> **BRIAN SULLIVAN, IRON LORE**

about the action. "I tend to think that we've used what I call 'Hollywood history'," Brian admits. "We're not trying to be perfectly accurate, we're just trying to meet people's expectations. We're focused solely on entertainment. I mean, I don't think the Vikings ever actually had horns on their helmets, but that's what people expect, so we'll stick 'em on there. We're certainly not trying to teach anyone anything."

Of course, the concern with a new studio such as Iron Lore is that the team isn't as experienced as it perhaps could be. This is something that is soon dismissed as you learn more about the team, and there are very few of them that haven't come from an impressive developing background. "I've done t-shirts," Richard Sullivan, lead creative artist at Iron Lore tells us with a smirk. "Hulk, Andre The Giant… all the big wrestlers of 1980. Every time Hulk Hogan ripped one of those shirts I thought, 'That's a nickel'. Oh, baby clothes designs as well, and newspaper cartoons. I've done it all. Oh, and sculptures. Once upon a time, I almost got a job on *Lord Of The Rings*. You might have heard of it – some small little venture that was put together down under. I almost got two jobs actually – they were

THE MAN, THE MYTH

It's an epic task, without a doubt – the Titans, gods above the gods, have escaped and it's up to you, a mere mortal, to recapture them. The fact that you're a brave warrior skilled in combat is, of course, a plus but even so, your journey is likely to be beset with danger…



IF YOU BUILD IT…

Also shipping with *Titan Quest* will be its very own map editor. Accessibility means a lot to the team at Iron Lore, but with this they have outdone themselves. Impressive to view, and easy to pick up, this tool will see most people creating lush landscapes in no time at all. We managed to create a nice little campsite in a little under ten minutes. We can certainly see this being a very popular feature.

selling me real estate sites I was so close. I guess it just wasn't meant to be."

Our eyes are drawn to a grizzly green mask that's hanging nearby. It resembles closely the face we all now know to be that of a Mordor orc, and we immediately wonder why this fact had not been the first thing mentioned and why Hulkamania t-shirts were placed on the top of his list of achievements. "I also went to the Jim Henson's Creature Workshop once," he continues with a chuckle. "They were very nice to me, then told me to leave."
This is a good example of the level of talent that Iron Lore has at its disposal, and these abilities spread right across the team. "Every member of the team here is incredibly driven," Richard tells us. "More than I've seen in any of my previous companies – and they can do it all: drawing, painting… It actually makes my job very difficult. I mean, I'm the one that's meant to be coming up with the drawings, and I know that everyone here could do it just as well as me."

This flair for artistry he talks about is strongly apparent in the many pieces of concept art that cover the walls, and pencil-drawn scorpion men and Gorgons glare out at us. There's definitely a feeling of history and accuracy about these creatures, and many ideas seen in the movies have been implemented into the characters. "That's something that Brian's been pushing." Richard informs us. "He wants these monsters to be believable, and I'm more than happy with that. If some people here had their way, everything in this game would look very Giger." Thankfully though, this traditional look suits the game perfectly, and from the snippets of game that were on show during our visit, the whole package is looking extremely sharp. The high production values that the team is obviously striving to maintain should guarantee that when we finally get to take *Titan Quest* home with us, we'll see a game that accurately represents the work that's being put in.

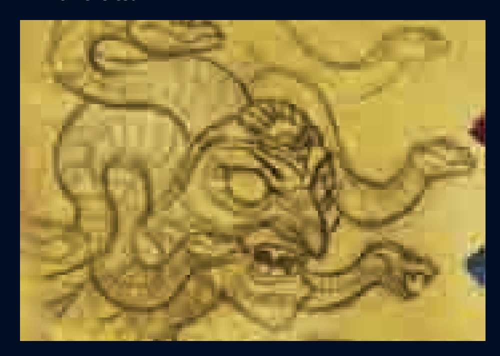
> "I ALSO WENT TO THE **JIM HENSON'S** CREATURE WORKSHOP ONCE. **THEY WERE VERY NICE TO ME,** THEN TOLD ME TO LEAVE"
>
> **RICHARD SULLIVAN, IRON LORE**

MOVIE MAGIC

You can't make a game of this type without consulting some of the movies that made the myths so famous, and Iron Lore certainly knew where to look for inspiration…

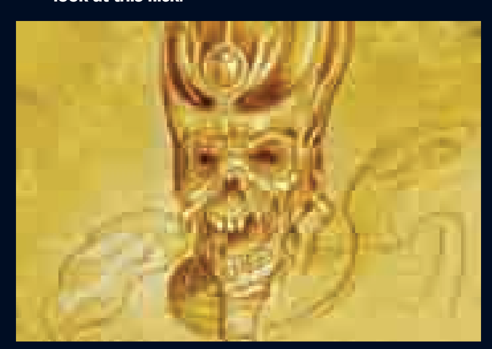
CLASH OF THE TITANS

The film that made Medusa a household name has also left quite a mark on *Titan Quest*. Many of the hideous creatures that were featured in this film have made it into *Titan Quest*, though most of them are looking a little more stylised thanks to the artists on the team.



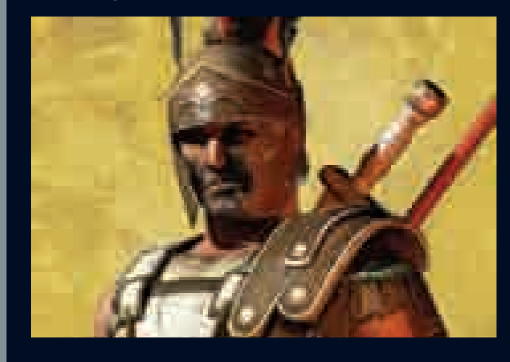
THE MUMMY

Nasty beasties that come wrapped in bandages are a common sight in horror movies, but *The Mummy* did it properly and made us really fear these baddies. With decomposing enemies turning up frequently, you know Iron Lore took a good hard look at this flick.



GLADIATOR

Although set in neither Greece nor Egypt, the influence that *Gladiator* has had on the game is obvious. Fighting styles and armour designs all look extremely authentic and certainly not unlike the get-up that Mr Crowe looked so dapper in throughout the movie.





"YOU DON'T HAVE TO ALWAYS GIVE YOUR AUDIENCE WHAT THEY WANT – SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO GIVE WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW THEY WANT"
YASUHIRO WADA



The Players

WE SPEAK TO YASUHIRO WADA, PRESIDENT OF MARVELOUS, ABOUT GAMES FOR GIRLS AND HOW IT FEELS TO NOT BE CONSIDERED RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR OWN ACHIEVEMENTS…

YASUHIRO WADA

MARVELOUS INTERACTIVE

There are few people out there who can claim that they're not only the president of a reputable development studio, but are also the mind behind a highly successful and original franchise. Even less common is it to actually get to sit down and have a chat with one of these people. Fortunately for us, Yasuhiro Wada is one such man and after he's flown all the way from Japan to see us, it only seems fair to ask him how he feels about this grand achievement.

"Terrible," he announces with a laugh. "It's hard work – I'd much rather just make the games than be the president of the whole company." It's a bit late for these thoughts now, though, Wada's been treating us to farming goodness via *Harvest Moon* for the best part of 15 years and has certainly earned his credible status. "There's a lot to worry about and despite the success of *Harvest Moon*, Marvelous is not really very well known in Europe yet. This is because other companies tend to be associated with our game. It's quite frustrating and this is something we are planning to change now we're with the publisher Rising Star."

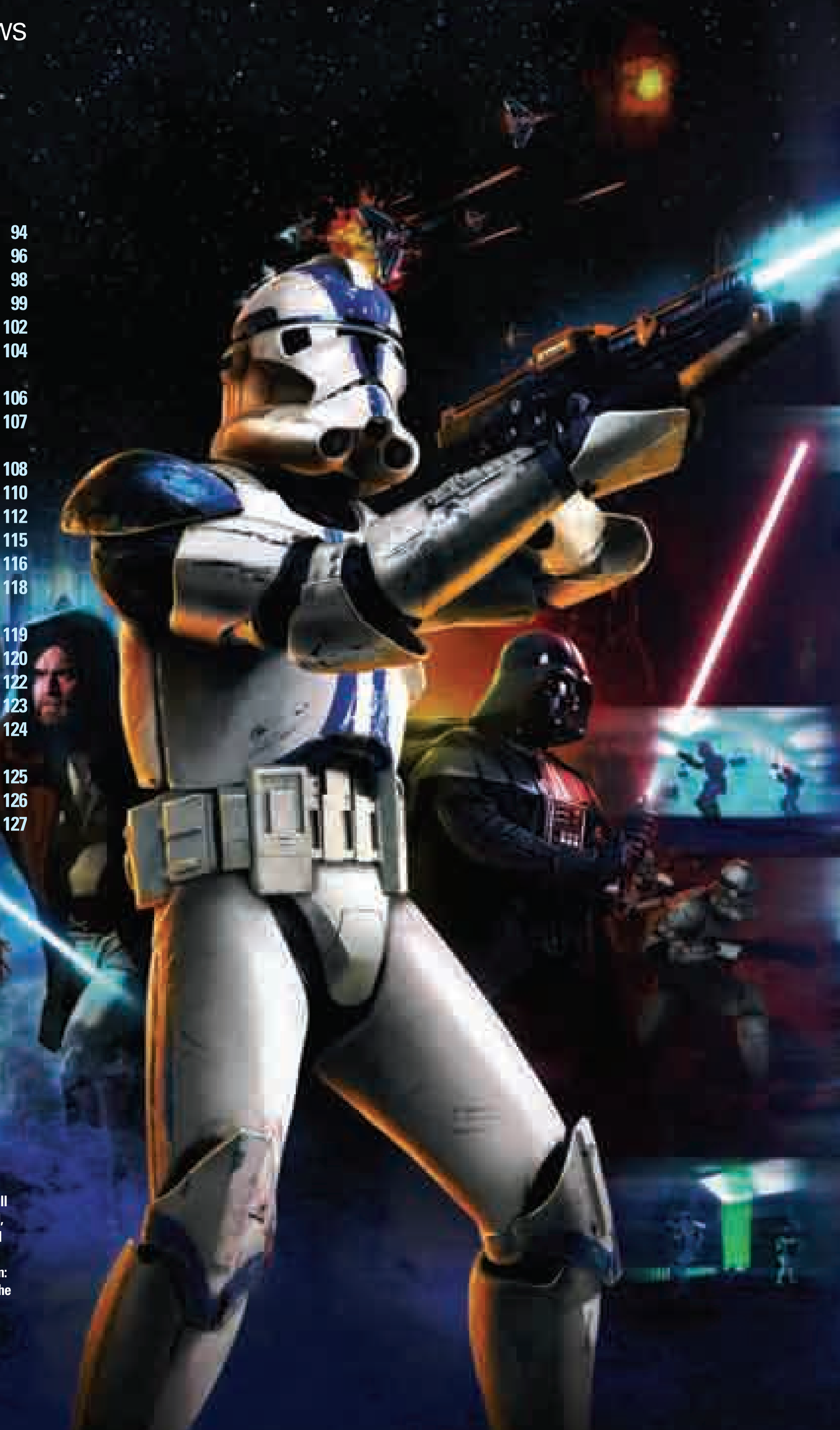
We get the impression that he's far more annoyed than he's letting on. We can only imagine the irritation of creating a series as reputable as *Harvest Moon* and then being forced to look on as many give the publisher all the credit. However, this hasn't lowered Wada's morale in the slightest and he's now looking toward ensuring his future projects appeal to the public as much as possible. "It's certainly not necessarily a bad thing to give the public what they want," he admits. "But, personally, I think putting guns in a Sonic game was a bad idea. It's very important to listen. In Japan, there were a lot of requests for a female character in *Harvest Moon*. So, in answer to that, we made *Harvest Moon For Girls*. Though, at the same time, you don't have to always give your audience what they want – sometimes you have to give what they don't know they want. That's the secret."

Mysterious words that make an awful lot of sense. We do like Wada. And the fact that *Harvest Moon: More Friends Of Mineral Town* is aimed toward the female market proves that he's listening to his own advice. Of course, this focus on videogaming ladies is a necessary move in Japan where, upon our last visit, we managed to get severely punished by many a female gamer in almost every arcade we found, but in our territory it's something that developers have only just started to consider seriously. "I think it's only recently that girls have become more and more interested," he tells us. "Ten years ago, it certainly wasn't the case – take the *Harvest Moon* series. We now have to think about how to please the girls as well as the boys. It's almost a 50/50 split now. You have to adapt to that."

Only now, after a fairly lengthy conversation, do we realise that we're actually wasting a golden opportunity and it suddenly seems really foolish to be sitting next to Wada and not probe him about what the next generation holds for the *Harvest Moon* series… "Well, it's definitely going to be online," he admits with a smile. We assume he's smiling because he knows that we're not going to be satisfied with that answer and are going to continue by questioning how this is going to be implemented. He probably finds this amusing because he knows he's not going to tell us. "I can't give you that information I'm afraid," he says as PR types descend upon the table. "But I will say that the future is all about online gaming. It's going to be important for the player to actually feel as if he's in the game because no one wants to feel as if they are playing a game. You may be inside your own room at home, but games should be a way to another world." We agree – and are now looking forward to the next *Harvest Moon* game even more. Thanks, Wada.

Harvest Moon: More Friends Of Mineral Town *is available now on Game Boy Advance.* Harvest Moon (Next Gen) *is currently in development.*

REVIEWS



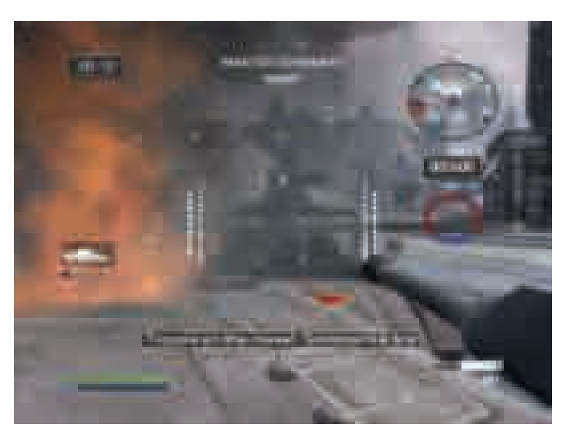
THE AVERAGE

Scoring's a messy business when it comes to videogames, so we keep things as simple as possible here at games™. Marking out of a possible ten, a game that is decidedly average will score five – that doesn't necessarily mean it's bad, just that it doesn't do anything particularly special against its peers. We also refuse to bow to PR pressure, meaning scores are our genuine opinion: we sing the praises of the great games and give the lesser ones the scorn they deserve. You might not always agree with us, but we're just trying to help – after all, everyone has an opinion, right?

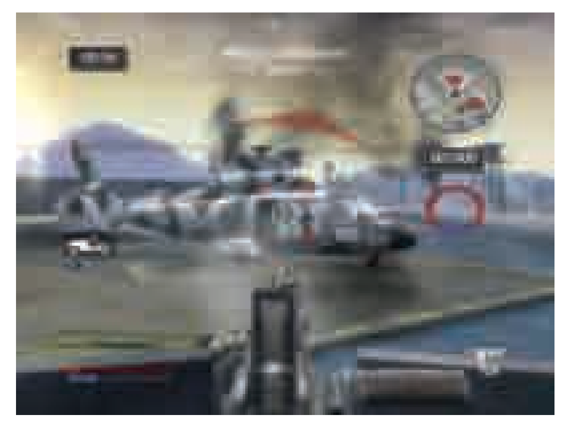


Pandemic returns with a smarter, slicker and altogether better Star Wars game. It looks more like the film than, well, the film… almost.

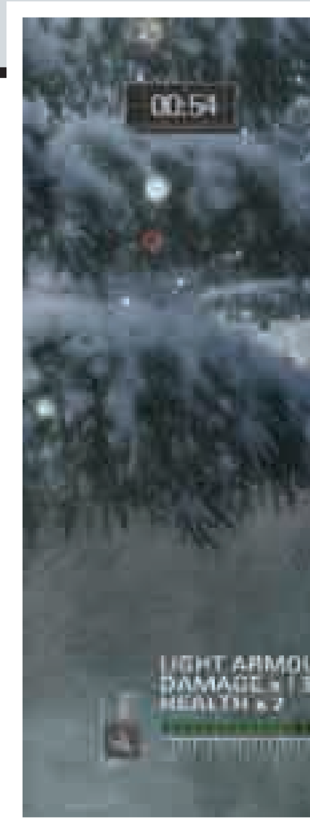
Star Wars Battlefront II 110



Going toe-to-toe with enemy vehicles is fine when you're driving a tank, but you'd better be ready to jump clear – if it blows up with you inside, you're liable to regret it in the morning.



Unfortunately, commandeering enemy vehicles isn't easy in the single-player mode so you might want to save those tactics for the more forgiving online side of things.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
UK/Sweden

PUBLISHER
EA Games

DEVELOPER
DICE/EA UK

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
18 November

PLAYERS
1 (2-24 Online)

BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT

WE WANT YOU, WE WANT YOU AS A NEW RECRUIT

An admission: despite our best attempts, we had genuine doubts that EA's translation of the *Battlefield* series to consoles was going to work. Maybe it was all the time we spent with *Battlefield 2* on the PC – revelling in the Squad and Commander options, conquering spawn points with our 32-strong team and loving every minute of it, knowing full well that half the improvements made by the game over its predecessors weren't going to make it into *Modern Combat*. Perhaps it was the worrying amount of delay that the game has seen since its announcement, mainly through EA's admittedly wise decision to add a 'proper' single-player mode as opposed to the offline multiplayer option originally in place. Or it could be our concerns that said new single-player mode, not being the traditional *Battlefield* that we know and love, would be… well, wrong. Damn our cynical and slightly bloodshot eyes.

As such though, we're pleased to admit that we were wrong on all counts and that *Modern Combat* is, to employ a word that makes us look like we're down with the kids, awesome. And hard. Bloody hard, in fact. As much as we believe ourselves to be indestructible crack shots through our experiences with *Battlefield* in the past, *Modern Combat's* single-player mode more than proves otherwise. This is a good thing, if only because it steels our resolve to become even more effective engineers, snipers and Special Ops commandos, and generally blows away any complacency that we may have had over the popping of all the caps in all the asses for many months to come.

That *Modern Combat's* single-player mode is somewhat different to the traditional *Battlefield* template of capturing spawn points and wiping out tickets, is perhaps its strongest point. Spread over 20 different missions played from a number of angles – the Americans, NATO and Chinese forces respectively – the mission-based, point-scoring take on the action that sees you completing objectives

The phrase 'death from above' has never rung more true – best take cover quickly…



FAQs

Q. IS IT HARD?
Oh, you'd better believe it. Keeping your troops alive requires constant HotSwapping, and you can't take the 'fire like crazy' approach that most FPS titles accommodate.

Q. SINGLE OR MULTIPLAYER?
Depends on your mood – the multiplayer is clearly the high point, but EA's UK studio has done a good job of bolstering it with the single-player (even if it's not *Battlefield* as we know it, and damn hard to boot).

Q. TOP RANK?
Requiring a mammoth 269 stars out of the 345 available, General is the highest rank of the 20 that are attainable… although you'll need some amazing skills in order to even come close to it.

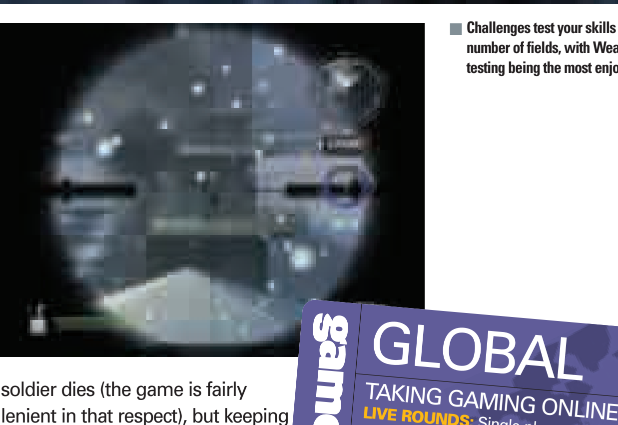


CHALLENGE ANNEKA

Despite being an aside to the main single-player campaign, *Modern Combat's* Challenge mode is more than just a mere distraction. Split into three distinct categories (Race, Weapon and HotSwap), each tests your skills in a different way – your accuracy with a wide variety of weapons, how quickly you can negotiate the terrain and your ability to pinpoint the fastest route from one place to another using HotSwapping. Simple enough tasks, certainly, but ones that will have you shouting out in anger/frustration over and over through their sheer toughness, although they're never unfair in any way. Regardless though, getting close to even two stars (let alone the full three-out-of-three) on any of the challenges should prove more than enough…







Challenges test your skills in a number of fields, with Weapons testing being the most enjoyable.

against an increasingly aggressive (and, at times, seemingly endless) opposition certainly has plenty of variety, despite fitting into a fairly rigid structure. Planting bombs, sniping targets, zooming around in attack helicopters and trundling across the landscape in tanks are all as you'd expect from *Battlefield*, although the missions are a little more complex than just moving from A to B, slaughtering anything that moves (even if mindless killing does feature high on the agenda). One early stage sees you attempting to defend an oilrig and its neighbouring island from incoming troops simultaneously. Needless to say, the whole thing soon turns into a frantic fight for survival as you fend off paratroopers at one end, zoom across the landscape in order to stop raiding boats and then have to head back for more death from above…

Of course, the key to all this high-speed movement is HotSwapping – the big addition for *Modern Combat* that, frankly, worried the living daylights out of us until we got to grips with the final code. It sounds bizarre: as long as the unit is in your line of sight (so not behind an obstacle or too far away), you can HotSwap to it with a simple press of the Y button. Getting low on health? HotSwap. Want a different weapon? HotSwap. Need to traverse the terrain in a hurry? HotSwap. It sounds like an overly pretentious gimmick, employed for its flashy 'whoosh' effects more than anything, but it changes the face of the gameplay completely and adds a hefty dollop of strategy to proceedings. Certainly, the fact that fresh troops appear periodically as you move through each mission means it doesn't turn into an exercise in constantly having to restart when a particular soldier dies (the game is fairly lenient in that respect), but keeping key troops safe from harm is still paramount, especially as each death costs a massive 5,000 points from your total. And believe us, points are paramount – kill combos and medal achievement may bolster your mission score but earning the ten stars available for each stage (stars that are essentially for moving up through the ranks and unlocking new weapons) takes what can only be described as 'mad skillz'. Like we said… it's hard.

But then, that only serves to make the game more enjoyable – giving you a series of targets to aim for, trying to improve your abilities that little bit each time in order to hone the skills needed for some quality online play. The two different modes may play completely differently (with online being the traditional *Battlefield* we all know and love, albeit with less players at once) but they compliment each other far better than we'd anticipated. For that, EA should be commended, especially since it saw sense enough to delay the game and add the single-player mode in the first place. Although you can be sure we'll be sending out a bill for all the broken pads that come about as a result…

gamesTM
GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE

LIVE ROUNDS: Single-player mode is a worthy addition, but it's still best played online. Although not as advanced as *Battlefield 2* on the PC, it's a great way to make friends and eviscerate people.

HALO 2

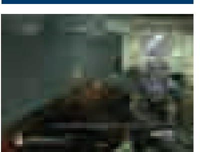


BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

BATTLEFIELD 2

PS2 £39.99



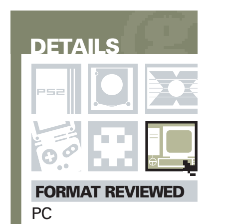
The slight Vaseline effect present in the Xbox version is heightened for the PlayStation2 edition to hide the visual deficiency, although the difference is only noticeable if you put the two side by side…



SURPRISINGLY ENJOYABLE OFFLINE, EVEN BETTER ON

FANCY DECLARING WAR ON GHANDI? COME ON IN…

CIVILIZATION IV



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
2K Games

DEVELOPER
Firaxis

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

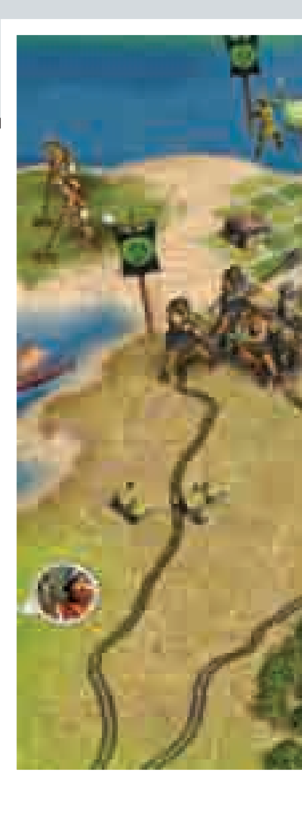
PLAYERS
1 (Online TBA)

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium IV or Athlon
1.2 GHz processor
256Mb RAM
1.7Gb HDD space

Sid Meier and his buddies have a unique headache. The original *Civilization* was a nigh-on flawless videogame, achieving everything it set out to do and becoming an instant classic. So what does the team at Firaxis have to do when it comes to making sequels? It's a tough but envious position for the *Civilization* team, as each sequel must simply refine its predecessor's ideas. However, with *Civilization III* Firaxis overcomplicated an already stat-heavy game and lost a few fans in the process. So it's good news for followers of the way of the Meier – *Civilization IV* is a triumphant return to form.

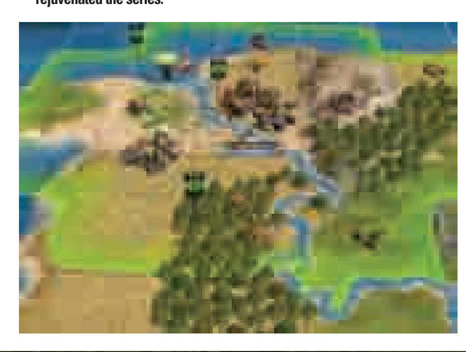
Taking on board all the criticism that had been levelled at *Civilization III*, Firaxis has sought to create the most accessible *Civilization* game yet. Even complete novices, normally daunted by the mere sight of the familiar *Civilization* map screen, are catered for – it's entirely possible to play an entire campaign with no prior knowledge of the series. By implementing a streamlined interface, littered with recommendations and suggestions, Firaxis has allowed new players access to a complex, strategy-heavy world without making them feel lost. However, that in no way means the game has been dumbed down. *Civilization IV* operates on numerous levels, catering for every grade of player ability. Strip back the layers of accessibility and *Civilization IV* is an incredibly and commendably, complex title, comfortably doing justice to its own hallowed name.

Despite *Civilization IV*'s drive to bring in new settlers, chances are if you're reading this review you're already a *Civilization* fan. Therefore, you're going to want to know just what Meier and friends have brought to the table this time out. Firstly, the game has undergone a complete visual overhaul. For the first time, *Civilization IV* is presented in fully scalable 3D, meaning you can zoom right into your settlements to keep track of what's going on, or indeed pull back to see the entire map on screen at once. The game is littered with pleasant little animations and particularly amusing battle scenes; you'll be audibly cheering on your little warriors when they bash their opponents in the face with a club or mace. Equally impressive is the sound design which changes dynamically depending on your proximity to cities and the level of zoom. Choose to research music and you'll hear tunes being played from within your city walls. It all adds to the experience and provides great feedback for your investments within the game's universe.



Firaxis took the criticism it received for *Civilization III*, and rejuvenated the series.

The fully scalable 3D presentation is pretty impressive, as is the dynamic soundtrack.





KING OF THE MODS

***Civilization* has always had a buzzing community of modders tinkering away with maps and unit types to create their own universes to play within. Firaxis is obviously very aware of this and has provided potential cartographers with a full set of world-building tools. It's even possible to load in a bitmap image and have it as the map. Sensible types will incorporate a satellite image of Europe, or something similar; silly types (read: us) will cover their maps in pictures of monkeys and pirates. We await with glee the first batch of modded maps to appear online. *Civilization: Middle-earth*, anyone?**

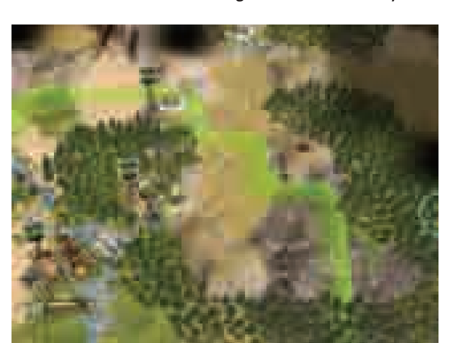


■ *Civilization* is now accessible to non-gamers, without losing the complexity its fans love.

The second and most important new feature of *Civilization IV* is its focus on multiplayer. Although *Civilization III* had multiplayer features, they always felt like an underused afterthought and never proved much of a distraction from playing alone. *Civilization IV*, on the other hand, has been designed from the ground up as a multiplayer title – and it shows. Initially, the options seem endless. It's possible to turn the game into a quasi-RTS by making each player take their turn simultaneously, changing the game significantly. Also, if a player chooses to drop out, the game's AI takes over, removing that frustration when playing with people who quit out when losing. The multiplayer, coupled with the extensive modding options (see King Of The Mods), mean that *Civilization IV* could quite feasibly take over the world. A game about taking over the world, taking over the world? That's too confusing for us mere mortals.

The joy of *Civilization* has always been the same. That sense of immense power and satisfaction that comes with creating a phenomenal empire is as enjoyable as it ever has been. And in some ways, this is *Civilization IV*'s only downfall. Although the multiplayer is an excellent addition, and the game looks suitably nicer, you can get the same buzz from playing *Civilization II*. It goes back to that headache that Meier has to endure: does he risk changing everything too much, annoying the fans for altering their favourite game? Or does he go back to basics and annoy the fans by not changing their favourite game enough? Either way, Meier is still on to a winner; *Civilization* has an enormous fanbase, and will sell regardless.

It comes down to a question of personal preference. Many will have already decided whether they will be buying *Civilization IV*. The fans will be queuing up around the block while, sadly, the non-believers are still unlikely to be converted. Even though stellar work has gone into making the game as accessible as possible, there's no escaping the fact that *Civilization* games are for *Civilization* fans. And fans won't be disappointed with *Civilization IV*.





VERDICT 8/10
OVERLY FAMILIAR, BUT NOT IN A BAD WAY

FAQs

Q. ANY NEW FEATURES?
Yes: 3D graphics are the main change. There are loads of little alterations and additions too.

Q. SUCH AS?
Golden ages, culture bombs… it's best to discover them for yourself.

Q. WORTH GETTING?
Depends if you're happy playing a slightly nicer *Civilization II*, or if you're dying for some online multiplayer action.

BETTER THAN
CIVILIZATION III

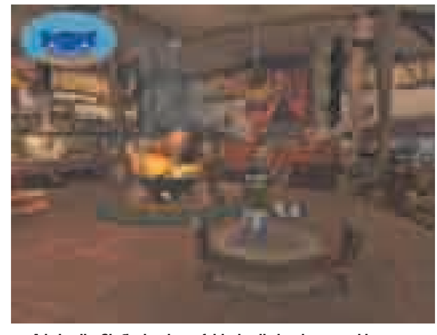

JUST LIKE

CIVILIZATION II





You'll have to play as Murray the overweight hippo several times over.



Admittedly, *Sly 3*s visuals are fairly detailed and eye-catching.



FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

LEAPING: Most of the time *Sly 3* is a fairly normal, unchallenging platformer…

CREEPING: …but races, stealth and shooting sections plus a mix of other things offer variety.

LIKE SPLINTER CELL FOR THE UNDER-TENS

SLY 3: HONOR AMONG THIEVES

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
SCEE

DEVELOPER
Sucker Punch

PRICE
£32.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

When you consider how generic most kids' videogames are – 'go here', 'find that', 'collect these', all for no particular reason – Sly Cooper games suddenly seem quite sophisticated. In what is essentially the only children's stealth game on the market, players can rob guards, don disguises and sneak around under tables in addition to the customary leaping about in a vaguely annoying fashion. The *Sly* games are inventive children's entertainment with easygoing gameplay and a colourful, likeable set of characters; hand this to your seven-year-old cousin and he or she will doubtless find themselves in a world of fun.

For those used to the *Splinter Cells* and *Metal Gear Solids* of this world, however, *Sly 3* offers nothing to get excited about. The game is well constructed and free from the lazy execution that's so prolific with child-orientated videogames, but this offers no challenge. The stealth elements, though well integrated, are as unsophisticated as we've come to expect from a game of this nature. Although the game is varied and, at times, quite innovative, there isn't enough here to keep most people playing.



The one thing that might persuade seasoned gamers to take a second glance at *Sly 3* is the fact that a raccoon-tastic pair of 3D glasses can be found tucked snugly into the manual. The game has certain 3D sections that are supposedly enhanced by the red and blue eyewear. Having completed a mission, you also unlock the option to play it through in 3D. Unfortunately, this feature really doesn't work. In the specifically designed sections there are one or two features that look reasonably impressive – everywhere else, the vague illusion of 3D is sadly marred by the horrendous headache that ensues following prolonged wear of the glasses and the fact that everything looks a harsh red colour. Happily, the game never forces you to play in the extra dimension – there's always the option to bypass the 3D and play through in full, normal, non-headache-inducing technicolour.

Ultimately, *Sly 3* is a solid and inoffensive kids' adventure which perfectly satisfies the needs of its target audience and credits it with a much more discerning nature than other games of its sort. Essentially, though, it remains a rather generic platform adventure despite its additional elements. As for the 3D glasses… it would be best if we all forgot they ever happened, yes?



VERDICT 5/10
GENERIC BUT INOFFENSIVE

VEXX



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



JAK II: RENEGADE

EXACTLY WHAT WE WISHED FOR, THOUGH NOT QUITE WHAT WE NEED

REBELSTAR: TACTICAL COMMAND

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

GAME BOY: Isometric 3D and the fact that players can pass a GBA between rounds make us happy.

LEVEL UP: Stat building during the single-player campaign makes us even more happy.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Namco

DEVELOPER
Codo Games

PRICE
$39.99

RELEASE
TBA (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

Pop fact: The original Game Boy had similar specifications to the Sinclair Spectrum. They were both Z80 systems, but the Spectrum had proper games that went beyond matching falling shapes or collecting coins. It had *Rebelstar*. Placing the tactical classic on a handheld was always a possibility with obvious rewards. Instead of the other player being set loose in your bedroom to deface your copies of *Crash!* as you make a move, you can just pass a Game Boy between you. Anywhere. It should be perfect. It should be so easy we have no idea why it's taken so long because the game is exactly as it should be. It's *Rebelstar*. If your memory doesn't stretch that far, then it's also all that is great about *Lasersquad* and *UFO: Enemy Unknown*. It's *X-Com* without the hassle of researching upgrades. It's *Rebelstar* in isometric 3D with a campaign mode where you can enjoy a story while boosting your team's stats thereby creating your own weapon specialist.

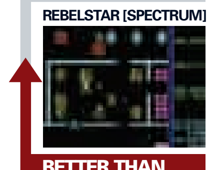
So you've never heard of *Rebelstar*. Well, two teams of soldiers face off across a map. Each member of a team's moves and actions cost Action Points (sniping is more cost-heavy than firing snap shots, for example) and spare APs can be spent on Overwatch enabling your trooper to take a shot during the other player's round should they be in range. This provides enough scope for players to use strategies in keeping with what you'd want to do if you were hunting the heavily armed, while Overwatch and the game's excellent use of fog of war and line of sight ensure that even the smallest of engagements is full of tension and suspense. It played like all the war game you'd think anybody needed. It still does.

Ironically, the only reason for pedants to be unhappy is the game's placement on the GBA. Unlike *Advance Wars*' ability to make your Game Boy feel like a custom-built machine, *Rebelstar* feels like a port. There's no multistorey movement, so the isometric view is redundant, and there are none of the additions that made subsequent outings better games. So you can't place a primed grenade in a plant pot and you never need look up? You've got *Rebelstar* on your Game Boy. Life is good.



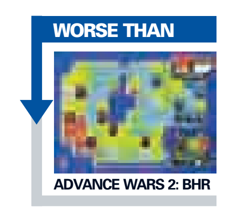
VERDICT 7/10
THE WAIT WAS WORTH IT

REBELSTAR [SPECTRUM]

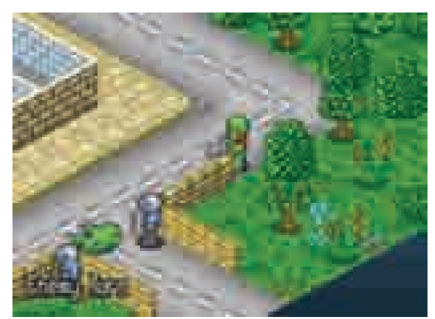


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



ADVANCE WARS 2: BHR



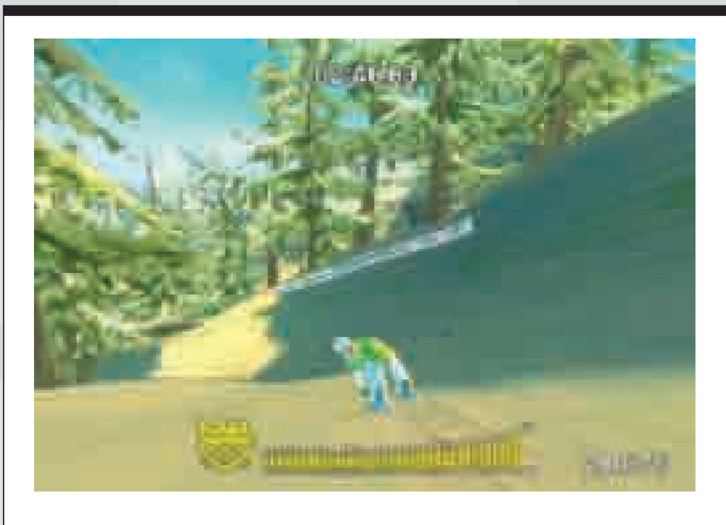
While we're not entirely convinced by the isometric viewpoint, it does prove that old gameplay doesn't necessarily have to be boring.



Nothing like a good explosion to wake you up in the morning – shame that's the last thing that the aliens probably wanted.



As with any turn-based strategy, it's an effective management of your troops that ultimately wins the day… but then, we're hoping that you already knew that.





DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GameCube, PSP

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
EA Sports BIG

DEVELOPER
EA Canada

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

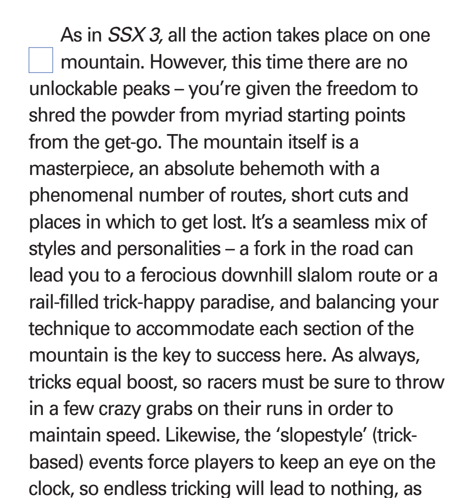
PLAYERS
1-2

A VERITABLE TOUR DE FORCE

SSX ON TOUR

Imagine, if you will, a world without Electronic Arts; the videogames industry would be a very different place. On the one hand, we would be rid of *FIFA Street*, sub-standard *Bond* games and *Need For Speed*. A discerning gamer's dream? Perhaps, but bear in mind what else we'd lose if there was no EA. No more *Burnout*. Or *Battlefield*. No *Tiger Woods*. And, of course, no *SSX*. If we have to put up with the dross in order to get titles of this quality, then so be it.

SSX On Tour arrives amid very little hype, drowned out by the collective roar of *Burnout*'s engines and *FIFA*'s excitable crowd, and in many ways is all the better for it. Without such publicity there's little expectation, so imagine our surprise and joy on discovering that *On Tour* is the *SSX* series' defining moment so far. An immaculately presented, ultra-smooth and beautifully playable game that rectifies the majority of its predecessor's niggles, and builds upon its foundations to produce something quite spectacular.



As in *SSX 3*, all the action takes place on one mountain. However, this time there are no unlockable peaks – you're given the freedom to shred the powder from myriad starting points from the get-go. The mountain itself is a masterpiece, an absolute behemoth with a phenomenal number of routes, short cuts and places in which to get lost. It's a seamless mix of styles and personalities – a fork in the road can lead you to a ferocious downhill slalom route or a rail-filled trick-happy paradise, and balancing your technique to accommodate each section of the mountain is the key to success here. As always, tricks equal boost, so racers must be sure to throw in a few crazy grabs on their runs in order to maintain speed. Likewise, the 'slopestyle' (trick-based) events force players to keep an eye on the clock, so endless tricking will lead to nothing, as running out of time means disqualification.

The real rush of *SSX On Tour* is something prevalent in the series as a whole but this time it's honed to near perfection. In many ways, the game is comparable to *Burnout*: pure adrenaline. Speed, flawless control and glorious feedback get the endorphins flowing and the blood pumping. Very little in gaming can match the sheer elation of springing off a steep ramp, then watching in awe as your boarder spins, flips and grabs his way through an incredible repertoire of tricks. The entire mountain suddenly pours into view and the music fades out, leaving only the high-pitched drone of the treble… the bass kicks back in as you hit the snow, your boarder punches the air and a shower of light fills the screen. Then five seconds later it all happens again. Fantastic.

The meat of the single-player experience is found in the titular Tour mode – a charge up

Monster tweaks are a nice addition to the usual trick selection… especially Air Guitar.



FAQs

Q. CAN I CREATE MYSELF?
Yes. If you look like a typical snowboarder, that is.

Q. WHAT'S THE BEST TRICK?
The Air Guitar monster tweak, without a doubt.

Q. AIR WHAT?
You heard us…



Careul on those flips, son – you don't want to lose your balance…

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

MONSTER: Right stick for uber-tricks gives the game a new feel.

NEED FOR SPEED: *SSX On Tour* reaches *Burnout*-like speeds at times.

ALPINE RACERS

***On Tour* features a first for the *SSX* series: you can ride the piste on skis as well as on a board, should you fancy it. The game plays almost identically regardless of your choice of transport but there's no denying the visual thrill of skiing backwards down the world's steepest slope. The 'monster tweaks' (right stick controlled) are different enough to warrant trying out the skis but, if the truth be told, it's little more than an aesthetic addition. However, avid boarders will enjoy being able smash down the random skiers that litter the slower parts of the mountain. You even receive boost for your trouble. Thanks, EA.**

the world SSX rankings which mixes every event type with simple collection and score-based tasks. It's a huge challenge, always offering at least three choices for the player. However, instead of powering Mac or Moby to glory, *SSX On Tour* allows you to create your own potential superstar. The creation options are admittedly limited – if you're looking to clone yourself in game, it'll help if you happen to have straggly hair and a beard – but there's a wealth of clothes and accessories to spend your earnings on. Watching your character develop and gain more recognition is thoroughly satisfying, but not entirely faultless…

You see, *SSX On Tour's* main problem lies within the Tour mode. Due to the singular nature of the mountain, the game asks you to traverse the same sections of piste again and again during your path to glory. This becomes quite tiresome after extended play, and it's all too easy to get stuck travelling down the exact same routes time after time. As the tour gets tougher, seeing the same white stretch of snow out in front of you becomes somewhat disheartening and it's a shame the thrills of reaching the latter stages of the previous games could not be matched.

There's one crucial factor, though. Even when the game begins to repeat itself, it never ceases to be fun. The initial wonderment may wear off slightly, but the engine is so solid and the gameplay mechanic is so enjoyable that *SSX On Tour* never drops below stellar status. The game oozes style from the moment it starts up to the moment the tour ends – hell, even the EA trax are good. So, another fine moment on the EA timeline – may there be many more.



VERDICT 8/10

A FANTASTIC ACHIEVEMENT, LET DOWN BY REPETITION

SSX3



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



BURNOUT REVENGE



The player creation options are limited but the sketchy page design is cool.



A TALE TO KEEP YOU WARM ON THOSE LONG WINTER NIGHTS

RADIATA STORIES

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Square Enix

DEVELOPER
tri-Ace

PRICE
$49.99

RELEASE
TBA (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

It's been a quiet year for Square Enix. With the ever-slipping duo of *Kingdom Hearts 2* and *Final Fantasy XII* remaining in 'done when they're done' territory and online venture *FFXI* due to hit next-gen systems early next year, we've had to make do with nothing but a pair of decent, if short-lived, titles *Kingdom Hearts: Chain Of Memories* and *Musashi: Samurai Legend*. But to close the year, how about a three-pronged assault from *Dragon Quest VIII, Romancing SaGa* and this anticipated new RPG from *Star Ocean* developer tri-Ace? Sounds good to us, Square Enix.

Real time combat – the heart of *Radiata Stories* – is a remarkably simple affair, even more so than *Star Ocean*. Bordering on button-bashing, it allows you to set up just a single combo from the skills you've learned (assigned to repeated presses of the Circle button) and you probably won't even need to use the Block, Lock-on or Volty attacks (special moves, just with silly names) save for in the odd, tough world map encounter and boss battles. For the most part it's basic and enjoyable, and seeing as how you can avoid most battles simply through overworld agility, it doesn't get too frustrating. The Link system makes things even more interesting, offering a range of formations for your party to adopt, each with different effects and bonuses. When you're in charge you can even bark orders at your collective, asking them to heal or protect injured members or ordering all-out offensives. Occasionally, difficulty spikes can make progress tricky – just be sure to kill enough things to keep your level above what it probably should be and you'll usually be fine. But it's not like that'll be a problem anyway…

Wherever you find yourself, there's always the opportunity for a little bit of a rumble. While only hostile enemies will go out of their way to attack you, even docile creatures and townsfolk can be coaxed into combat thanks to Jack's trusty kick. Occasionally, in the case of people, doing so will yield rare items or convince the victim that your cause is a worthy one but this is only one way to strengthen your numbers. Some citizens are ready to help immediately, while others may require you to do them a service of some kind before they'll lend you their (often fairly useless) services. There are almost 200 allies available to recruit but, unlike the *Suikoden* games, you won't be able to recruit them all in a single run for one very good reason.

Pigtails, huge eyes – it can only be a Japanese RPG heroine. If only all girls looked like this…



The real-time combat doesn't take long to get the hang of, although it does feature some attacks that border on the ridiculous.



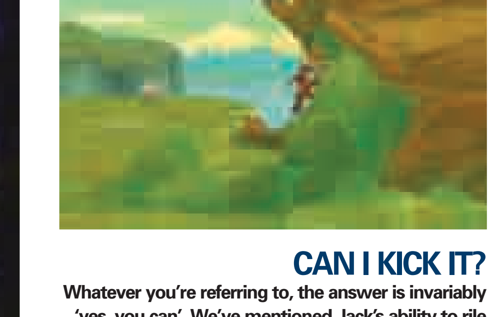
FINGERPRINT

games™

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

LINK TWICE: Group your party together to perform team attacks, or keep units safe.

BRANCH OUT: Pick your route for two entirely different closing chapters.



CAN I KICK IT?

Whatever you're referring to, the answer is invariably 'yes, you can'. We've mentioned Jack's ability to rile townspeople and sleeping creatures, but the kick can also be used on objects scattered around the game. After all, you never know when you'll find a curative item by kicking a rock, or find a music CD tucked away in a hard-to-reach cabinet. Just as entertaining are Jack's walk and enthusiastic door knocking (basically pummelling doors with his fist) but it's the camp strut that we keep going back to. Somewhere between fairly standard 'sneak' and 'run' animations lies what must be the gaming world's most amazing walk. Jack Russell, we salute you.



Typically for a Square-Enix RPG, big attacks are accompanied by suitably flashy visual effects.

About two thirds of the way through, the game splits in two. Now, we wouldn't dream of spoiling it for you but suffice to say that when this happens, the last eight hours or so are entirely different on both paths and your available comrades will vary accordingly. Be it an attempt at something a little different or a cheap way to coax the player into starting a second run, the fact that we did just that means that it must have worked to some extent. It's slightly frustrating to know that you're missing out on so much whichever route you choose but with *Radiata* clocking in at the 'fairly short' mark by Square's standards (around 25 hours), it's genuinely worth going through twice, if only to pick up on the subtle touches and slight changes that occur that you might have missed first time through.

With its sprawling world map, *Radiata Stories* gives a real feel of exploration despite the fact that most areas consist of little more than a few winding paths. The towns are far better; human capital Radiata is gigantic and teeming with life. The population goes about its daily routine according to the game clock, so whenever you wake up you'll see a couple of old guys out for a stroll and shopkeepers on their way to work – while late at night, bandits and more shady characters come out to play. The clock is applied to all aspects of the game so as well as governing who's doing what at any particular time, it can also prove advantageous in finding new recruits or avoiding some world map encounters as the once-ferocious beasts take a doze.

Lead character Jack Russell is loveable in a silly kind of way and couldn't be more aptly named, always tackling a situation with childish curiosity and blissfully ignorant courage, or rummaging through other people's stuff trying to find… well, things. Ultimately, it's hardly a stunning RPG or an essential purchase but *Radiata Stories* is a charming, entertaining and compelling adventure, nonetheless.

STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



DARK CHRONICLE

FAQs

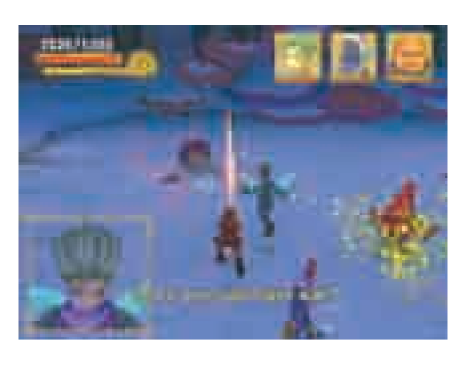
Q. SO IT'S A BIT STRAIGHTFORWARD?
For the first few hours, yes it is, but then it throws you in at the deep end and opens up like you wouldn't believe. Then closes up again shortly after.

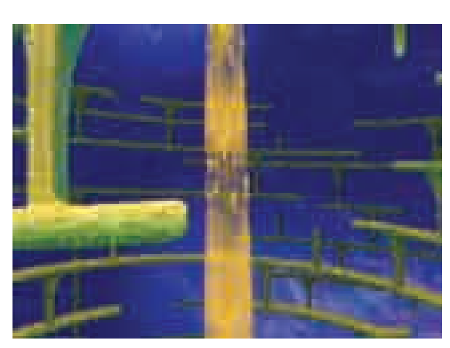
Q. HOW'S THE COMBAT?
Again, it feels crushingly simple at the beginning but the new elements that are added as the game goes on, evolve it into something really quite special.

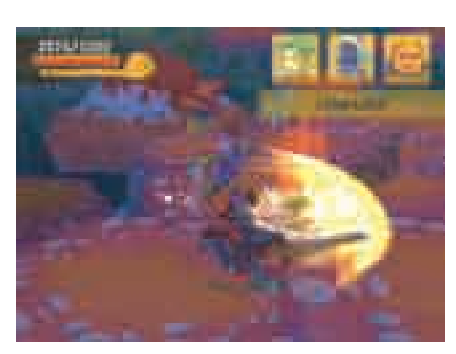
Q. DECENT STORY?
Yeah, fairly standard but – stop us if you've heard this one – gets better with progress.

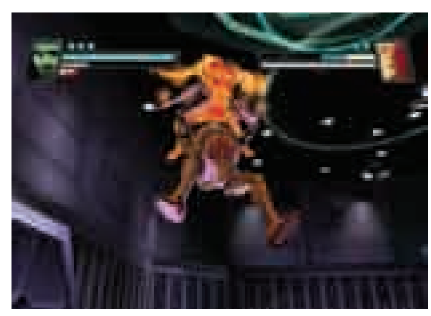
VERDICT 7/10

REWARDS TIME INVESTED WITH AN EPIC ADVENTURE

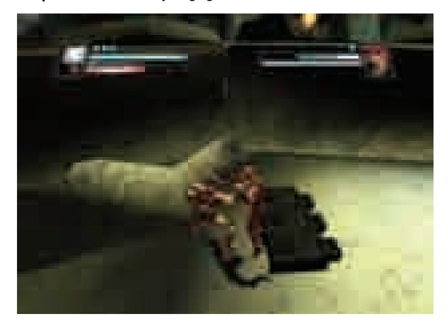








Special throws like this can be done at will, with the opponent being complete unable to do anything against it. Sounds like fun, doesn't it?



Here's what the game looks like for the most part – a distance camera with no real focus on the action. What a travesty.



Ultimate 'finishing' moves come complete with their own cut-scenes detailing the highly unimpressive action. Just who thought this was a good idea for a game?

games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
WEB SLINGER: Go online and try your luck against other players around the world. But quite why you'd want to challenge anyone at a game devoid of skill is beyond us…

IT'S OKAY, EA – NOBODY LIKES BALANCED FIGHTERS ANYWAY

MARVEL NEMESIS: RISE OF THE IMPERFECTS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, PSP, GC, DS

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

While it's clear what EA has tried to do here, how *Marvel Nemesis* got past the conceptual stage is a mystery. Rather than balancing the game at all, the focus is on individual powers – Wolverine climbs walls with his claws, Storm flies and Venom can toss huge chunks of scenery. So every player is just going to go for the character with the best skills, that being Iron Man: he can fly, fire projectiles and lift heavy things. And he's really strong, really tough and really fast. Broken.

The solo and multiplayer games are two separate entities, the latter being a straight one-on-one brawler while the former is a sort of scrolling beat-'em-up that incorporates elements of the multiplayer. And since you have to play through the single-player game to unlock features beyond the six initial characters, you'll be glad to hear that it's abysmal. Clunky, painfully repetitive, hugely drawn out and based around the limpest of narratives, this is one of the worst single-player modes we've seen in many, many years. Broken.

Bring a friend in and things get worse. Once you've both picked Iron Man, so begins a contest to see who gets knocked down first. So you're down: now your opponent simply tosses every object in the stage at you until you die. Similarly, damage your foe enough and you'll get 'Rage' which temporarily grants you infinite power – like you're not going to sit back and throw projectiles at a helpless grounded opponent. Pick different characters and matters are worse still. While you're able to catch objects thrown at you, weaker characters can't defend against anything larger than they could normally lift. So bigger, stronger characters will almost always win, regardless of player skill. Broken.

An odd visual style tops off a very poor title in a suitably poor manner, jumping between looking halfway decent and just plain nasty. Unlockable video comics will entice *Marvel* fans to slog through this disgraceful excuse for a game but when the fighting engine has less depth and emphasis on skill than a game of Top Trumps, we simply can't recommend *Nemesis*. 'Imperfect' would be as much of an understatement as calling Hitler 'a bit naughty'. So, one more time for emphasis… Broken.



VERDICT 2/10
AN UNBALANCED AND SORELY BROKEN MESS

SONIC BATTLE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

MARVEL COMIC HEROES TOP TRUMPS

OH! FIRST PLACE! HOW DID THAT HAPPEN?

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
SCEE

DEVELOPER
Naughty Dog

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
4 November

PLAYERS
1 (2-6 Online)



JAK X

When Naughty Dog announced a kart-style racer for the next instalment of the critically and commercially successful *Jak And Daxter* franchise, there were more than a few raised eyebrows. Yet, we held out a modicum of hope that the celebrated developer could somehow pull it out of the bag. It couldn't. Quite simply, *Jak X* is a disaster. You know a game's in trouble when its best feature is the ability to spray-paint your vehicle. It's a horrible, cynically produced, soulless and poorly designed racing game that manages to be as equally boring as it is frustrating.

The game focuses on 'combat racing', or 'shooting opponents with *Wipeout*-style weapons'. The cars handle reasonably well, and feel sufficiently weighty, but none of this matters when you've just blown up for the eighth time in a race and still don't know why. The game is plagued with flaws and it's nearly impossible to finish a race without exploding at least once. These blasts are not entirely random – they're caused by opponents' mines or missiles – but there's next to nothing you can do to avoid them. Infuriating. Skill also seems arbitrary – there are no rewards for accomplished driving, it's all down to luck. Why give the player the ability to deflect an incoming missile, if your enemy can just fire another one immediately afterwards at your now defenceless vehicle?

Admittedly, the game doesn't focus entirely on races – there are death matches, *Road Rage*-style events and a host of other assorted generic woes. Everything is cribbed from either *Burnout* or *Need For Speed* (you can mod your car – ooh how exciting) but is executed with such a lack of skill that the game ends up an overstuffed mess.

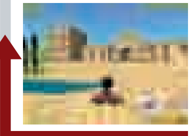
It's all capped off with a story so incredibly bad that it instantly becomes the stuff of legend. Jak and pals are attending the reading of his late father's will when a hologram of the deceased appears and tells the family that they've all been poisoned, but it's a slow-acting poison that lasts – yes – the exact length of a race season. They'll only get the antidote… well, we're sure you can figure out the rest but you shouldn't have to. Just take our advice – don't buy *Jak X*. Don't rent *Jak X*. Just ignore it, and hopefully, *Jak* X will go away.



Boost all you want, Jak – it's not going to stop your opponents from blowing up whenever they like…

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
TAKEDOWN: Slow mo cutaways for recently 'totalled' enemies? Where have we seen that before?
RANDOM ANGER: Love blowing up and not being able to do anything about it? Buy *Jak X*.

STAR WARS SUPER BOMBAD RACING



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN





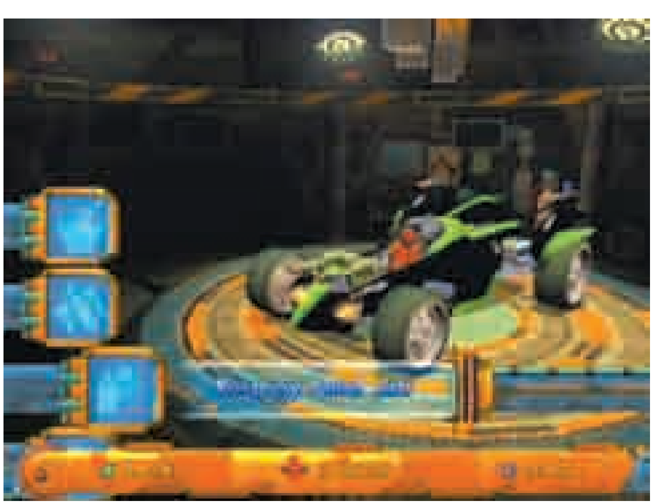
JAK AND DAXTER



VERDICT 3/10
A CYNICAL MESS AND THE LOW POINT OF JAK'S CAREER



Looks incredibly bland, doesn't it? Well, wait until you actually bother playing it. Actually, no… don't bother.

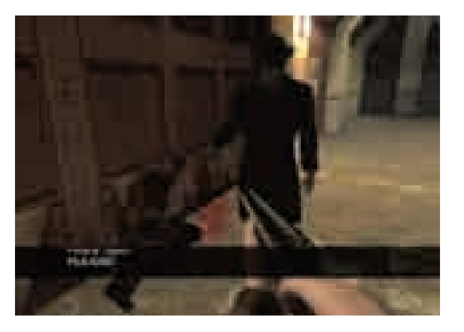


The obligatory 'car pimping' area – a complete waste of effort if ever there was one.





Better weapons can help you progress, but stealth and secrecy are still the best way to keep yourself out of harm's way.

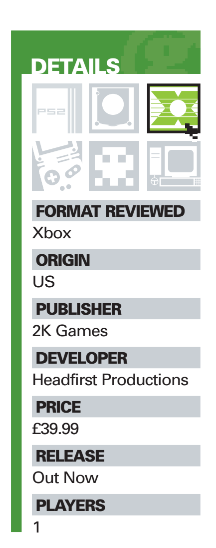




Not surprisingly, the opposition comes armed to the teeth – unless you fancy a hole in the head, you're better off avoiding them altogether.

"I'M GOING SLIGHTLY MAD…"

CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
2K Games

DEVELOPER
Headfirst Productions

PRICE
£39.99

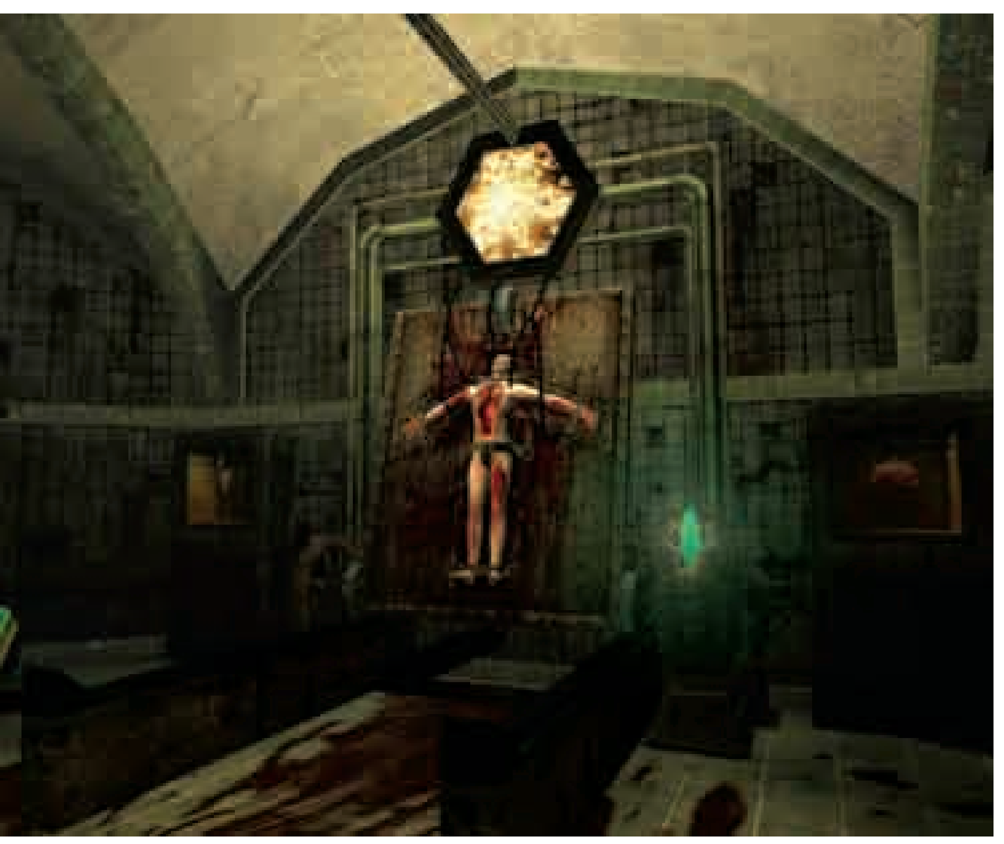
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Evolving a franchise from tabletop and board games to home consoles is a far from new concept, but that there are still massive IPs being tapped when such translations are usually fairly strong is really quite strange. The obvious *Dungeons & Dragons* titles must rate among the most memorable and popular (including the plethora of games that borrow from the *D&D* rule set), while even outsiders have proven their worth. *Space Hulk* took nicely to the 32-bit generation, the *Warhammer* games fit perfectly into the RTS genre and even the likes of *Future Tactics* and *Makai Kingdom* owe at least a nod to the tabletop games of old. So how such a potential-laden name as *Call Of Cthulhu* has slipped by the wayside for so long (save for a PC adventure title back in the Nineties), we'll never know. But it's here now… so we guess it's all okay.

Given its origins (Bethesda is also working on the gorgeous *Elder Scrolls: Oblivion*), *Call Of Cthulhu* is an unsurprisingly beautiful title. The game's gloomy setting is wonderfully realised and – save for the fact that most doors fail to fulfil their sole purpose – relatively believable. With the lights off and the surround sound system fully cranked, there are few games that rival *Cthulhu's* grimy atmosphere and real sense of menace and impending harm. The linearity of *Dark Corners Of The Earth* works both for and against it; frustrating beyond belief when scouring deserted areas for a key item, while adding to the sense of panic when escaping a group of people that want to punish you. And you'll see a lot of those.

But *Cthulhu* really comes into its own when the brand's trademark mental instability and paranoia kick in. With protagonist Jack Walters' six-year memory lapse raising countless questions about his past, each flashback or vision makes you wonder what happened during that prolonged bout of amnesia. And to make matters worse, exposure to horrific imagery (of which there is plenty) can wreak havoc with your sanity, sending your vision swimming and often resulting in hallucinations. You'll see murdered people up and about, hear disembodied voices, and even enjoy being messed around by time itself as your condition deteriorates. Physical condition is equally as important. Fall a long way and you'll break your legs, reducing movement rate substantially until you patch yourself up *MGS3*-style, take an axe to the arm and your



Okay, so perhaps this doesn't look as scary as you might expect, but then *Call of Cthulhu* is a slow-burner; one that really gets under your skin.

weapon aim will go out the window (not literally), while more substantial damage sees the colour drain from the screen, and all manner of visual impairments make any real progress next to impossible. Oh, and Jack suffers from vertigo, so whenever you need to cross rafters or rooftops, your vision swims and spins to represent your discomfort on screen.

Progression is intentionally slow and fairly laborious, requiring you to check most documentation you find and search most rooms thoroughly for the one puzzle item that'll let you progress the narrative. To make this less of a chore, the in-game literature is well written and, at times, disturbing – even Walters' diary does a great job of setting the somewhat grim scene. A lack of weapons for a sizeable chunk of the game means that there's a reliance on stealth and hasty retreats until you finally stumble upon Gordon Freeman's weapon of choice and, soon after, a pistol/shotgun combo. Not surprisingly, the whole pace of the game changes dramatically once weapons come into play. Being spotted is a call to arms, readying one of the weapons that become more and more plentiful as the game goes on. But try to just trudge through every one and you'll quickly fall foul of a lack of ammo and more foes than you can possibly hope to eliminate – sneaking around is still by far the best way to stay safe.

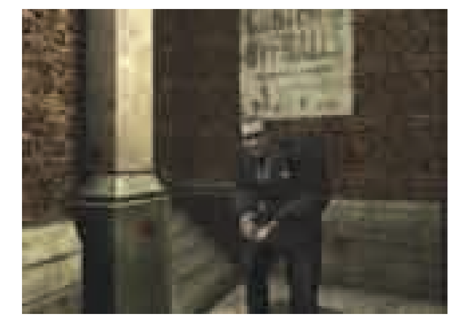
Coming from a tabletop RPG adventure offering as much freedom as the players have imagination, the painfully strict linearity is easily *Dark Corners Of The Earth*'s single biggest flaw. There's absolutely zero leeway in how progression is made – rooms and puzzles are usually designed in such a way that only one possible route exists, hazards make going the wrong way a life-threatening impossibility and you're forced to hurry through certain areas with seemingly limitless hordes of enemies. It's pretty clear that this has been done to concentrate on the more unique aspects of the game – random hallucinations and enemy movement mean that situations are different each time you may come to tackle them. Intriguing, atmospheric and imaginative, *Call Of Cthulhu* offers an entertaining and original gaming experience for those strong enough of stomach and mind to see it all the way through.





BASKET CASE

One of *Cthulhu*'s best features is its ability to make you question anything and everything about the characters, locations and events in Innsmouth. Are those increasingly frequent visions flashbacks, premonitions or just plain insanity? Are those things attacking you real or just your imagination bending the truth? And what exactly happened in those absent six years in Walters' memory? *Cthulhu* poses a lot of questions and keeps you thinking – how many games make you doubt the motives and morals of the guy you're vying to keep alive?



Just because he's a policeman, doesn't mean he's not also a nasty piece of work. Our advice? Keep your distance, Walters…



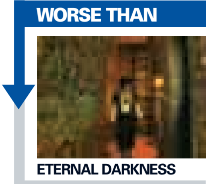
The game switches to black and white on a number of occasions to heighten the tension and scare the bejesus out of you.

SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



ETERNAL DARKNESS

FAQs

Q. VERY DARK, ISN'T IT?
Yes. Makes things more atmospheric and spooky, you see.

Q. WHY AREN'T THERE MANY WEAPONS?
To create tension, dummy. Like only being able to use a torch on its own in *Doom 3*. This isn't an FPS, though.

Q. SO IS IT LIKE HALO?
You're not listening, are you? A first-person viewpoint doth not an FPS make…





Sponging from other, more successful FPS titles, *Serious Sam II* sadly lacks long-term interest.



Watch the birdie… oh, and beware of Sam's dodgy one-liners. Who's a pretty boy, then?

SERIOUS SAM II

SERIOUSLY HURTS YOUR TRIGGER FINGER

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PC

ORIGIN
Croatia

PUBLISHER
2K Games

DEVELOPER
Croteam

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

If you missed from this range, we'd question the extent of your gaming abilities.

Endlessly running, endlessly strafing, endlessly firing, not at all serious; *Serious Sam II* is an endless game that hurtles along at breakneck speed until you either hit the level exit or run out of health. There's no subtlety involved and Croteam hasn't even seen fit to include a Reload button, as you pummel away at wave after wave of enemies and slowly work your way through the game. As such, anyone who's played *Serious Sam* won't be surprised to learn that there's very little new on offer and it's just another hefty slice of one-dimensional gunning, coupled with some awful one-liners from Sam himself.

And that's both its charm and its failure. The charm comes from its simplicity, serving as an antidote to a genre suffocated by stealth and gimmicks. *Serious Sam II* is arguably what *Doom III* should have been, with funnel-neck level design giving you no room to escape from constant assault. Indeed, it unashamedly raids the FPS classics of yesteryear for its best ideas – *Duke Nukem's* bravado housed in *Doom's* level design married to *Quake's* over-the-top weapons. Anyone who grew up with games during that era will find that the game tickles the nostalgia senses in the right places, plus it's rare to hit any dead ends, get lost or find anything to distract you from the job at hand.

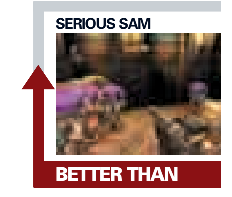
Sadly, this has the all-too-predictable side effect of getting old rather quickly. Despite some varying objectives, they all boil down to the same thing – fetch the cursory object serving as the key, kill the enemies that appear as you grab it, proceed onward. It's a horrible Catch 22 situation, as throwing in needless elements would only move *Serious Sam II* away from its old-school appeal, but you'll find your interest levels sagging at the halfway point. There have been token attempts to include variety, in the form of bizarre vehicles such as UFOs and dinosaurs, but all this does is shift the carnage to a different mode of transport. It's the underlying gameplay that wears thin.

It's to Croteam's credit that *Serious Sam II* manages to stay interesting for as long as it does, thanks to the weird enemy design and tight levels keeping the pace from slacking. You will inevitably tire of Sam's adventures, though, and it's unfortunate that when this happens, Croteam doesn't come up with a fresh idea of its own to drag you back.

games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
THIS IS SERIOUS: *Serious Sam II* isn't afraid to embrace the future, as the Xbox Live options show. Hopefully, there will be enough owners to justify what should be an excellent multiplayer mode.

VERDICT 6/10
GOOD FUN, BUT REPETITION EVENTUALLY KILLS IT

SERIOUS SAM



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT

WANTED: UNDEAD OR ALIVE

DARKWATCH

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
High Moon Studios

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4 (2-16 Online)

The influence of *Halo* on console FPS games seems to have no bounds. It's almost guaranteed that every new shooter that launches will have borrowed at least one of Bungie's ideas, be it the rechargeable shield, the two weapon limit, or the left trigger grenade throw. However, *Darkwatch* really has taken this cribbing to its natural conclusion – it pilfers all of *Halo*'s ideas. There's a warthog-style jeep section, a substantial melee attack… even the movement controls seem identical.

While some may cry out at the game's lack of originality, there's no denying *Darkwatch*'s charm. The setting is generic yet effortlessly entertaining; a vampire cowboy who joins a gang of regulators in order to vanquish the undead hordes. The graphics are lovely, capturing the mood perfectly and never creaking, despite some seriously intense action scenes; ultimately the game is a very solid and enjoyable blast.

The real joy of *Darkwatch*, however, is its simplicity. It's a pure, no-nonsense shooter, entirely focused on allowing the player to dispose of innumerable undead in ever more amusing ways. Fans of *Halo*'s shotgun/melee combo will be in heaven here, in fact it's possible to shoot a ghoul's arm off, melee it into midair and then blast it to pieces while it's still up there. With some juicy headshots, nicely balanced weapons and suitably theatrical ragdoll physics, *Darkwatch* provides a visceral, if limited, FPS experience that rarely lets the player down.

Alas, *Darkwatch*'s strengths are also its downfall. It's far too limited and unoriginal to be held in the same esteem as the Xbox's greatest shooters, and anyone after a sophisticated playing experience will be sorely disappointed. The game's later levels are arduous, and as with so many games, *Darkwatch* runs out of ideas about two thirds of the way through its narrative, and resorts to an endless onslaught of enemies, and (ugh) a platforming section to keep the end up.



Yes, he's big and scary… but then, you've got a shotgun. Huzzah.



Darkwatch must be remembered for what it does well, though. The final hour may grate, but the seven or eight that precede it are enjoyable, silly and addictive. A *True Crime*-style good/bad dynamic is enough to warrant another play through, as are the four difficulty levels (hello again, *Halo*). It's a title that won't fail to make you smile for all the right reasons, and if it can do that, then that's half the battle's already won.

VERDICT 6/10
LIMITED, BUT DOES LITTLE WRONG – A SOLID BLAST

MACE GRIFFIN: BOUNTY HUNTER

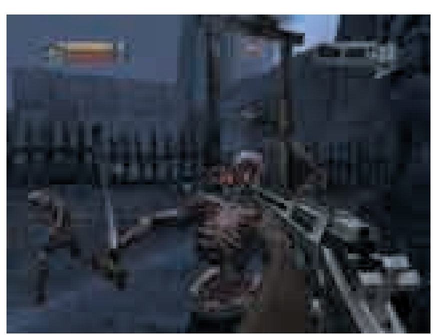


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



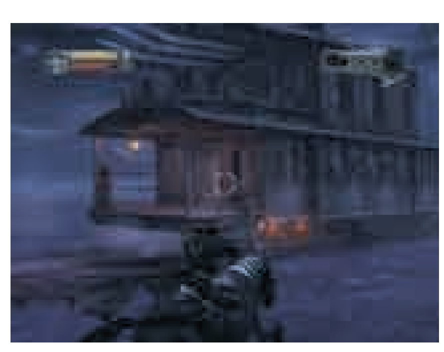
HALO 2



Don't be expecting too much originality from this 'borrower' of ideas.



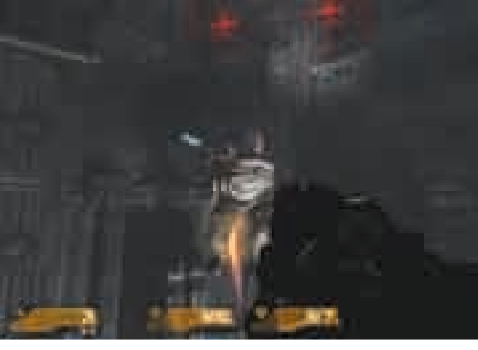
Big guns plus undead enemies equals… well, one hell of a mess.



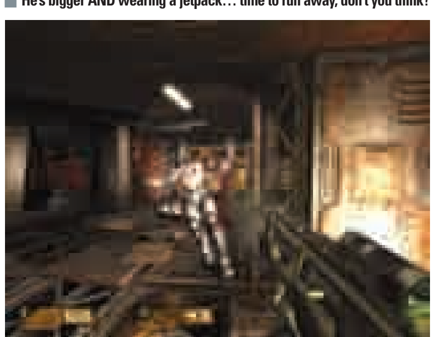
Darkwatch has that addictive quality that can at least keep you hooked.



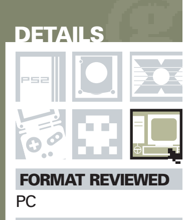
Surprisingly, trying to protect your own men during chaperone missions is as much fun as blowing away hordes on oncoming Strogg…



He's bigger AND wearing a jetpack… time to run away, don't you think?



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox 360

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Raven Software

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (2-32 Online)

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium 4 2.6Ghz processor, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb graphics card, 2Gb HDD space

QUAKE 4

THE MOVER AND THE SHAKER

Perhaps *Quake* is something of an ironic title for the latest outing from Raven Software, because this is certainly not the game to shake up the FPS genre on the PC. Undoubtedly, *Quake 4* is a classic FPS blueprint, constructed to the exact specifications set out by popular demand – hardly the revolution you might have been hoping for.

Many (us included) thought that *Quake 4* would turn out much like *Doom 3:* damn pretty, but sadly monotonous due to the restrictive nature of the gameplay, which kept players locked tightly within the corridors of the ill-fated Mars research base. Thankfully this isn't the case, even though the majority of the action is again set firmly within the confines of yet another hostile series of formerly human facilities. The reliance on the classic FPS style combined with shameless point-to-point gameplay is probably why *Quake 4* seems as if it isn't breaking new ground… but when these elements are executed with such panache by the talented chaps over at Raven, it really doesn't affect the player's inevitable enjoyment of the game.

You could nit-pick over the fact that the physics aren't as enjoyable as those in *Half-Life 2,* or that enemies spawn in an oh-so predictable way, but chances are you'll be too immersed in the experience to worry about the trivialities. The feeling that you're really filling the shoes of *Quake*'s latest hero Kane, and that you're actually involved in an epic conflict on an alien planet is the secret weapon that serves the single-player part of the game so well. Radio chatter fills your virtual headset, allies run around on their own personal missions and your team-mates display the right balance of intelligence that ensures that they are useful without being invincible. In fact, keeping your squad mates alive is one of the keys to success in *Quake*, because they're on hand to heal you, repair your armour and watch your back. Lose a medic, and the fight gets tougher as the level progresses.

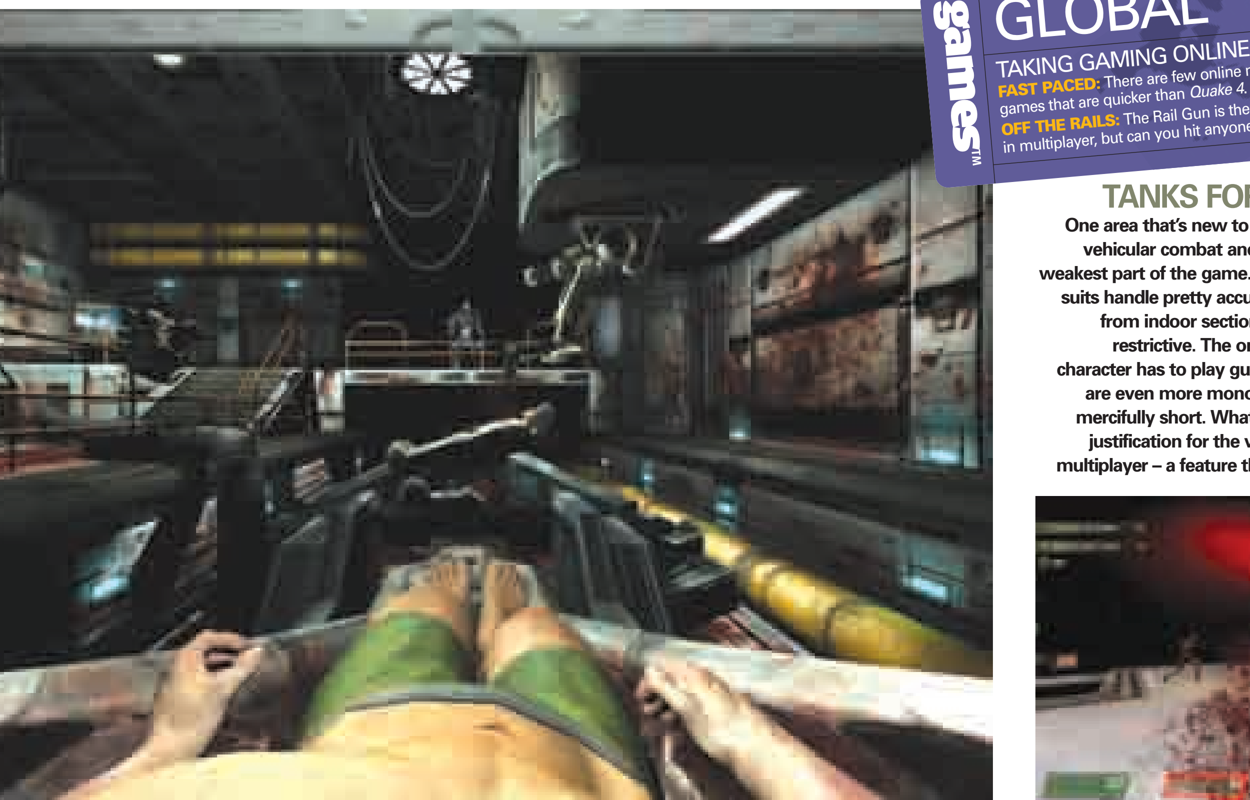
Naturally, all this solid gameplay and sharp-witted AI would all be for nothing if *Quake* didn't look the part. Anyone running this game on a serious PC gaming set-up will be able to appreciate just how much time and effort has gone into making *Quake 4* the best-looking game on the PC. The textures and lighting are unbelievably crisp, far eclipsing those seen in the admittedly impressive *Doom 3* just a year ago. While purists would argue that graphics are window-dressing for the gameplay, there's no doubt that the fact that *Quake* looks so stunning is the main reason why players are able to immerse themselves so deeply within the game. As the smooth FPS action does

FAQs

Q. ISN'T THIS JUST A MULTIPLAYER GAME?
No. The story element in *Quake 4* is a major part of the overall package here, and is well worth playing.

Q. IS IT BETTER THAN *DOOM 3*?
Absolutely. Pound for pound this game is far better than *Doom 3* as a PC title and a franchise update.

Q. IS THE MULTIPLAYER JUST *QUAKE III ARENA*?
Kind of, but it's much prettier. Still, this is no bad thing, especially if you've played *Quake III Arena*.



GLOBAL

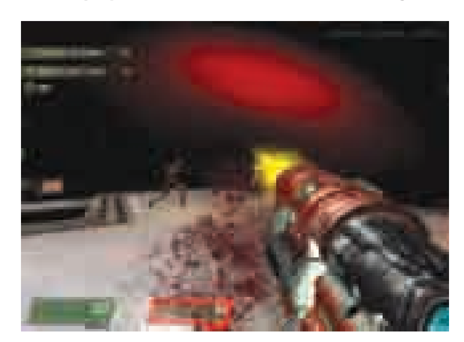
TAKING GAMING ONLINE

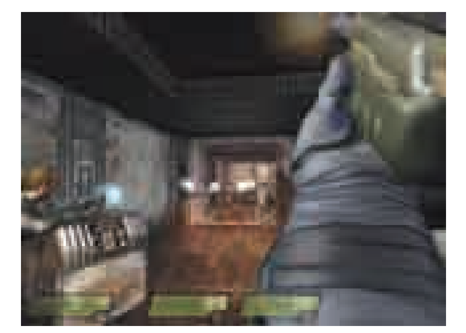
FAST PACED: There are few online multiplayer games that are quicker than *Quake 4*.

OFF THE RAILS: The Rail Gun is the best weapon in multiplayer, but can you hit anyone with it?

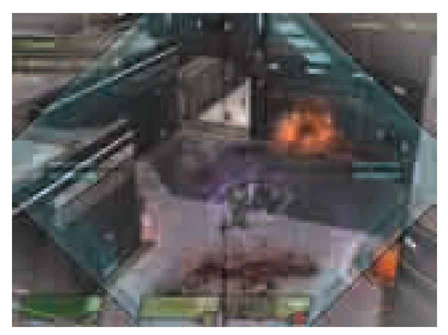
TANKS FOR THE MEMORY

One area that's new to the *Quake* series is that of vehicular combat and sadly this is probably the weakest part of the game. Sure, the tanks and mech suits handle pretty accurately and provide a break from indoor sections, but in the end they feel restrictive. The on-rails sections where your character has to play gunner to protect transports, are even more monotonous, although they are mercifully short. What might have been a better justification for the vehicles is their inclusion in multiplayer – a feature that Raven chose to ignore.

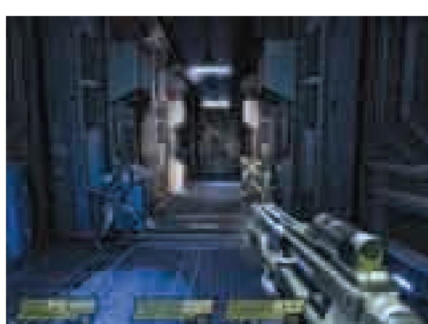




Many of the weapons have a genuine feeling of recoil to their use.



Why make friends in multiplayer when you can just frag them instead?



Alone, no more – you'll get to fight alongside fellow soldiers now.

nothing to break the game's realistic quality, it becomes apparent that the *Quake 4* experience will keep players gripped until the bitter end, as they attempt to dispatch everything Strogg from the face of the game world. Quitting out from the game is a rude reawakening and serves only to remind players how deeply into the *Quake* universe they have slipped: the hallmark of a truly great game.

Speaking of greatness though, *Quake's* famous multiplayer has made a return to the fold, and this version is looking and playing as expertly as ever. Okay, so the deathmatch action here is almost identical to *Quake III* in terms of gameplay, but it has undergone cosmetic changes that have an effect on how the whole thing feels. Now damage is more location-specific, meaning that anyone who wants to pull off a headshot will have to hit their opponent on the character model's head, rather than shooting in the general area – a subtle improvement that's bound to separate the men from the boys during Rail Gun scraps. In fact, *Quake 4's* multiplayer will come as a gift for hardcore FPS fans, as it's still the quickest, slickest online experience known to man. The single-player may have all the visual trickery and neat little scripted sequences, but in terms of sheer heart-pounding action, the multiplayer wins hands down.

But, if you already own *Quake III Arena* and *Doom 3*, is this worth buying? Quite simply, yes. *Quake 4's* single-player is a significant step up for FPSs, not because it does anything original, but because it delivers what could be described as the definitive action experience (although you'll need a fairly high-spec PC to truly enjoy it). Couple this with the fact that the multiplayer is a more advanced version of *Quake III Arena,* and it should be clear that what you're getting with this package is two great games for the price of one. *Quake 4* isn't quite essential, and falls slightly short of perfection, but when it outclasses almost everything else out this Christmas…



VERDICT 8/10

TWO SOLID GAMEPLAY EXPERIENCES FUSED INTO ONE



XBOX 360 £34.99

Early impressions from looking at this Xbox version of the game suggest that it plays in an almost identical way to the PC title. However, unless you fancy splashing out hundreds of pounds on a new graphics card, we're willing to bet the Xbox 360 version will take the prize for visual splendour.

ARGUABLY THE MOST INACCURATE USE OF THE WORD 'ULTIMATE' EVER

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GameCube, PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

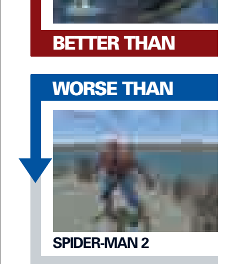
DEVELOPER
Treyarch

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

FANTASTIC 4



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

SPIDER-MAN 2

It's got to be said that of all the superheroes out there, Spider-Man is the most reliable. Whether promoting his new film or sporting an all-new '3D comic inking technology' look (which apparently, is completely different from cel-shading despite looking very similar), he makes an appearance every year to spin another yarn featuring his heroic deeds. What a guy.

Unfortunately, few genres can get away with this kind of frequency and it was unlikely that the level of quality seen in certain previous titles could be delivered each time – at least not enough to keep those not obsessed with the fact that you can play as Venom as well as Spider-Man happy. Eventually this was bound to happen and the formula has become well and truly stale. It doesn't help that several of Spidey's moves from past games have been stripped out, meaning that the huge amount of travelling around that always proved enjoyable thanks to a range of webbing methods, is now a fairly hollow experience.

As dreary as this makes open area sections, it's the chases that suffer. Missions involving gliding between buildings while attempting to keep up with a foe, have been part of most 3D Spidey titles to date, but *Ultimate Spider-Man* manages to let these tasks – that, frankly, were already testing our patience – drag the whole package down. It happens far too often. No matter which enemy you're up against they all run from you, forcing you to give chase and chance your demise should you fall too far behind. Airborne characters, such as The Beetle and Electro, prove even more monotonous, as they irritatingly fly up, down and around buildings in an effort to shake you. It's something that gets really old inordinately quickly and, when coupled with the simplistic combat which features in all the other areas, only succeeds in creating the feeling that you're wasting your time.



games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
LOOKING GOOD: 'New' 3D comic inking technology makes the game look very attractive.
GOOD TO BE BAD: Playing as the brute Venom is a breath of fresh air, but only a breath.

No, for all the effort that's obviously been put into the visuals and the style of the game, this is almost guaranteed to offend all but the very hardened of Spider-Man fans and even then, once the contentment of seeing the impressive 'ultimate' look of the *Spider-Man* characters has faded and the comic book flair has become old news, it's still going to be a very bitter pill to swallow.

VERDICT 3/10
ITS BEAUTY IS ONLY SKIN DEEP



Unfortunately, some of the boss fights seem to go on for far too long – people with ADD should stay away.



Playing as Venom isn't nearly as fun as it should be; why is there no alternate ending where the bad guy wins?



Yes, her name really is Oldbag – Wendy Oldbag, to be precise. Get it? Windy old bag. A Capcom tongue wedged firmly in a Capcom cheek.



The court record contains everything from witness profiles to evidence and is essential if you hope to win any of your cases.



You can't just go shouting 'Objection!' at every turn – with only five chances to get your accusations right, you need to pick your moment.

ORDER! ORDER IN THE COURT!

GYAKUTEN SAIBAN: YOMIGAERU GYAKUTEN

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

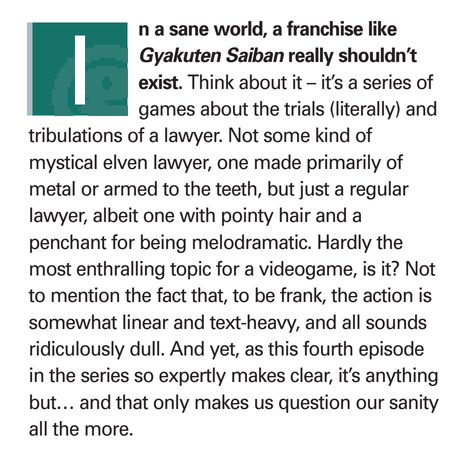
DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥4,800

RELEASE
Q2 '06
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

In a sane world, a franchise like *Gyakuten Saiban* really shouldn't exist. Think about it – it's a series of games about the trials (literally) and tribulations of a lawyer. Not some kind of mystical elven lawyer, one made primarily of metal or armed to the teeth, but just a regular lawyer, albeit one with pointy hair and a penchant for being melodramatic. Hardly the most enthralling topic for a videogame, is it? Not to mention the fact that, to be frank, the action is somewhat linear and text-heavy, and all sounds ridiculously dull. And yet, as this fourth episode in the series so expertly makes clear, it's anything but… and that only makes us question our sanity all the more.



Unsurprisingly, the game's movement onto the DS does little to expand the core gameplay already set out in previous instalments: placed in a number of increasingly difficult cases, it's up to you to prove that your defendant is innocent despite all the evidence pointing to the contrary. Doing this requires various methods but the outcome is always a mixture of exploring the crime scenes to find evidence, talking to everyone about everything to gather more evidence and then using said evidence to find contradictions in the testimonies of the prosecution witnesses.

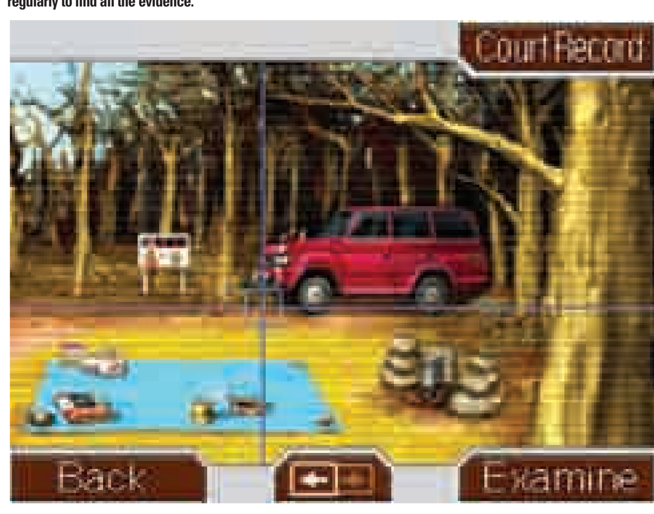
games™ FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
PAGE TURNER: With convoluted stories and plot twists, *Gyakuten Saiban* is akin to a full-on novel.
BRAIN DRAIN: Working out how to use evidence can often require a fair amount of thought.

Again, it sounds incredibly boring and it probably would be if it wasn't for the vibrant way that Capcom brings the characters to life through the witty script and constant demands on the brain required to uncover the holes in each case. It's all very tongue-in-cheek – from the interaction between lawyer Phoenix Wright and his assistant Maya or the bizarrely comical witnesses to the overall manga styling of the game – and that's exactly what turns the game from a potential yawn-fest into something far more enjoyable.

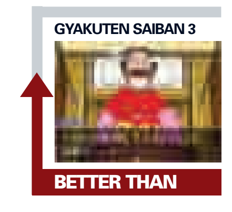
Naturally, there are functional improvements that liven the game up even more: the use of the touch-screen allows for easier access to crime scenes, evidence, court records and other such menus, while being able to shout 'Objection!' into the microphone to invoke Phoenix's trademark finger pointing never fails to raise a smile. Despite these gimmicks, however, it's the strength of the stories that helps carry what would otherwise be a fairly linear and uninteresting concept. A niche title, then, but one that those looking for something unique should enjoy with relish.

VERDICT 7/10
IT REALLY SHOULDN'T WORK… BUT IT DOES

You'll have to examine each crime scene thoroughly and regularly to find all the evidence.

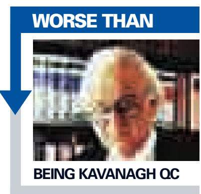


GYAKUTEN SAIBAN 3

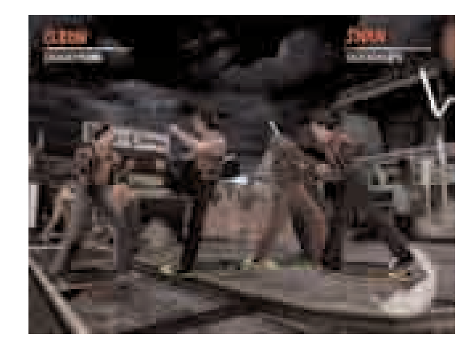


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



BEING KAVANAGH QC



THE WARRIORS

"I'LL SHOVE THAT BAT UP YOUR ASS AND TURN YOU INTO A POPSICLE"

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
Rockstar

DEVELOPER
Rockstar Toronto

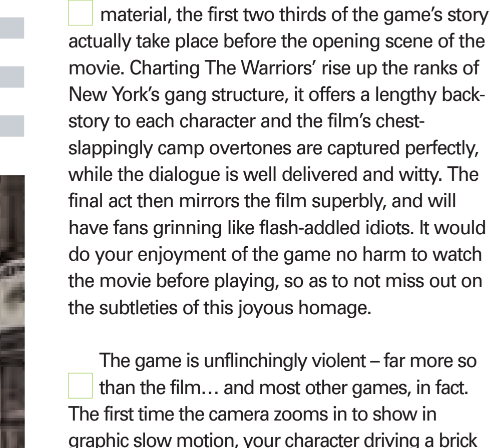
PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Remember, this is street violence we're talking about – as such, don't be afraid to punch, kick and otherwise maim a guy when he's down.

Movie licences are generally considered a bad thing. Even since the 8-bit days, publishers have been churning out poorly executed fodder that resemble the movies in name only. Back in the day it was side-scrolling platformers, while today we suffer a constant stream of third-person 'me-too' action games. But now and then a licence turns up that does justice to its namesake, either by fleshing out the film's plot, or staying true to its character and atmosphere. Rockstar's anticipated adaptation of 1979 cult classic *The Warriors* is one such game; it's a movie licence steeped in respect for the original.



Unsurprisingly considering the shortness of the material, the first two thirds of the game's story actually take place before the opening scene of the movie. Charting The Warriors' rise up the ranks of New York's gang structure, it offers a lengthy back-story to each character and the film's chest-slappingly camp overtones are captured perfectly, while the dialogue is well delivered and witty. The final act then mirrors the film superbly, and will have fans grinning like flash-addled idiots. It would do your enjoyment of the game no harm to watch the movie before playing, so as to not miss out on the subtleties of this joyous homage.

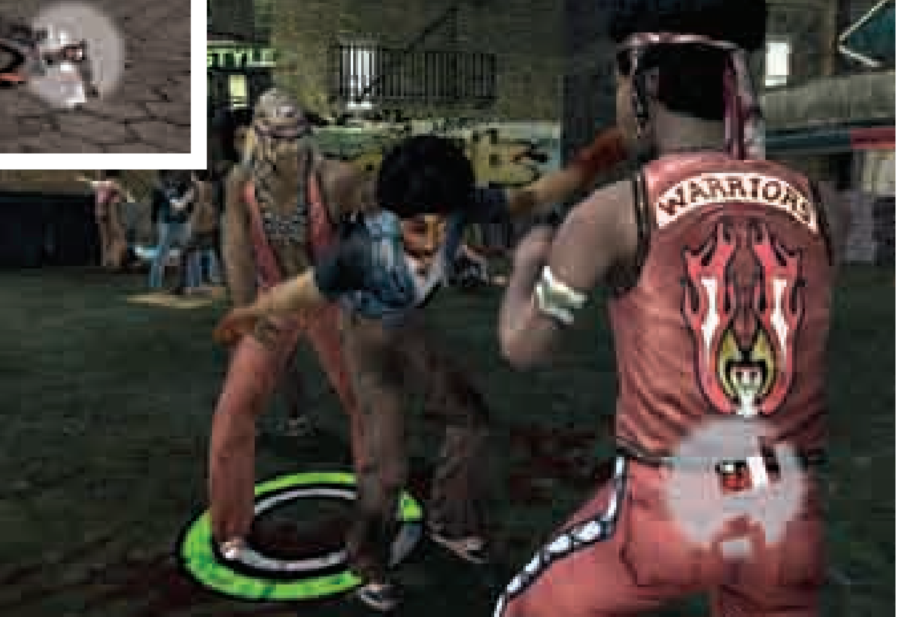
The game is unflinchingly violent – far more so than the film… and most other games, in fact. The first time the camera zooms in to show in graphic slow motion, your character driving a brick



Need some cash? Then swipe anything valuable nearby – jewelery stores, parked cars and even innocent bystanders can all yield serious green.



Tandem attacks can be tricky to use but when they work, they're more than a little brutal.





FINGERPRINT

games™

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

BLOODY ROAR Real time damage modelling shows the ferocity of battle.

RESPECT DUE: The licence is used superbly to flesh out the film's plot, giving weight to characters.



Despite sounding awkward, the game's two-player mode actually works really well – the camera, in particular, is very well handled.



into an enemy's face – accompanied by copious blood, swearing and a horrifically pained facial expression – is as shocking as it is spectacular. If *GTA*'s violence is *Tom & Jerry*, then *The Warriors* is *ID* or *The Football Factory*. It captures the chaos and carnage of an all-out brawl to a tee with blood, noise, bottles flying, attacks from all angles… it's quite a sight. The combat system suits the hectic action: streamlined yet deceptively deep, allowing for all manner of reversals, double team moves and brutal finishing blows. You can use basic squad commands to instruct your gang to back you up, scatter, or attack, but the fighting never calls for tactics. It's pure, unadulterated carnage that feels significantly different to all other examples of the genre.

It's not all about the fighting, though. In an attempt to break up the potentially repetitive nature of constant brawling, Rockstar Toronto has rammed its game full of gang-themed features. There's graffiti tagging, looting, mugging and stealth to occupy your time. Each of these features activates a small mini-game – for example, tagging asks you to follow a pre-set line with your analogue stick, trying to keep within the lines to complete the 'bomb'. Mugging someone involves moving the stick to make the joypad rumble, effectively wearing down the victim until they give up their cash. It's full of nice ideas, but none are executed with the panache of the uncompromising combat and often prove more a distraction than a welcome addition. Having to constantly visit a 'spray' dealer in order to complete a mural is particularly grating, breaking up the action and slowing the game to a grinding halt.

Also affecting the game's pace are the stealth sections, as they're a somewhat hit and miss affair. Certain levels allow stealth as an option, offering copious shadowy nooks and crannies in which to hide from police or malevolent rival gangs, if you so wish. Other levels force you down a linear route with numerous enemies to distract and dispatch, which feel stilted and awkward as a result. Some of the story missions are poorly designed, and upset the game's flow. Also, the boss battles are pretty dire consisting of throwing bottles around like a drunk at a coconut shy, and they almost always feel tacked on. They're inconsistent with the rest of the game, enforcing invisible barriers and pattern learning into a combat engine that's greatest success is its spontaneity.

However, for every awful moment in *The Warriors*, there are two great ones. The mix of story, nostalgia and out-and-out combat is a heady concoction and when it all clicks, it's thoroughly enjoyable. The bonus features add mileage to the package, and the inclusion of co-op battling is a fine addition. The shocking violence and content may be too strong for some, but fans of Rockstar's unique brand of adult entertainment will be happy to come out and play.

VERDICT 7/10

ENJOYABLE THOUGH FLAWED, BUT FANS WILL LOVE IT

"YOU WARRIORS ARE GOOD… REAL GOOD"

The Coney Island hideout acts as a pre-mission hub, but also plays host to all the game's bonus features. The best of these are the 'flashback' missions – a level for each of the key members of the gang, detailing how they came to join up. There's also Rumble mode, a multi-optioned fighting game, catering for everything from one-on-one combat up to nine-on-nine free-for-alls. You can even create your own gang. This is a superb online gaming opportunity that Rockstar has sadly missed, leaving you to make do with battling buddies' gangs offline, via the memory card. A real shame.

FAQs

Q. IS IT LIKE THE FILM?
In many ways, it's actually even better.

Q. HOW'S THE SOUNDTRACK?
Thoroughly excellent really, it's suitably nostalgic, plus all the tunes from the film are in there too.

Q. SHOULD I BUY THIS MYSELF?
Fans of *The Warriors* will no doubt love it, unfortunately those new to the 'brand' may well find the game somewhat empty.

BEATDOWN: FISTS OF VENGEANCE

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



GTA: SAN ANDREAS



Miss a beat and you'll set off the Bob-ombs lined up across the top – one of the few ideas that's actually quite smart. Shame it's so easy…



Typically, Mario spends as much time playing mini-games as he does dancing… but that's really not the point of a DDR-style game now, is it?



With a lacklustre selection of songs and ridiculously low difficulty level, we can't see any dedicated DDR fans wanting to play along with Mario and his pals.

games™ FINGERPRINT

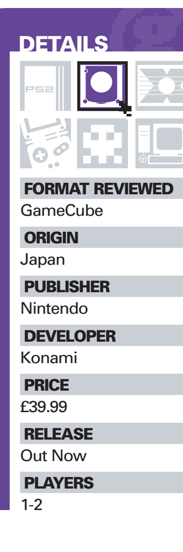
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

STEP ON: You can 'dance' in time to a rather poor selection of tunes. What fun.

MIX UP: Extra elements add a little variety… and a lot of confusion as well.

NINTENDO'S MASCOT PARTIES LIKE IT'S 1999

DANCING STAGE: MARIO MIX



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Konami

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Why is it that Mario seems to appear in every GameCube title released these days? From showcasing his basketball and snowboarding skills in EA's catalogue to the wealth of activities he gets up to on the Nintendo payroll, is there nothing he can't do? As the GameCube enters its twilight, Nintendo must be pushing for software support so hard that it's willing to lend its figurehead to third-party products. Speaking of which, here's the next Mario vehicle – Konami's aging *DDR* series gives the work-shy plumber a stunning stage on which to bust out his best moves. And he slips up.

Starting with just one tune unlocked (an irritating remix of *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, which gives you an idea of the game's level), Nintendo cordially invites you to wade through a nonsensical narrative to unlock more Mario-inspired remixes. Pretty much every memorable tune from the tubby icon's past is defiled with shoddy beats or misguided vocals and even after unlocking the whole collection (which weighs in at just under 30 songs), there are only a couple of tunes worth playing more than once per difficulty. Story mode throws up some interesting ideas – knocking flames and hammers back and forth in boss battles, and stepping on tentacles that shoot up the screen, for example – but these are only really Mario-themed versions of the arrow modifiers that have existed for years.

In only a few hours, we'd aced the limp Story mode twice and finished every song in the game with a perfect combo – something we still can't claim with the original PSone title *Euromix*. Arrow timing is beyond lenient, meaning perfect scores are common and unless you're the world's biggest fanboy (or indeed, fangirl), the music selection will make you want to vomit up essential internal organs like your lungs. They're important.

To be honest, you have to wonder why this even exists. *Donkey Konga* has been a successful and unique addition to the rhythm action collective while this sits in limbo; too simple for those with any kind of rhythm, while too Nintendo-focused to introduce newcomers to the genre. Recommended only for *DDR* completists or people who would seriously consider Mushroom Kingdom cosplay.

VERDICT 4/10

UNTIMELY, TOO EASY AND GENERALLY NOT VERY GOOD

DANCE:UK



BETTER THAN

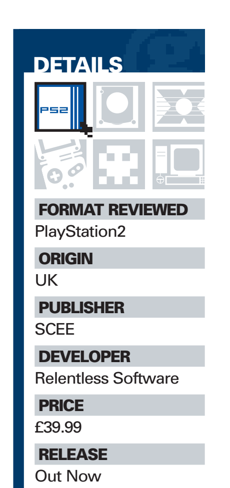
WORSE THAN



DANCING STAGE EUROMIX

WE REALLY WANT TO SEE THOSE FINGERS

BUZZ!: THE MUSIC QUIZ



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
SCEE

DEVELOPER
Relentless Software

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

Videogames aren't generally something you share with your family. They usually don't care whether Kratos is being mauled by a Hydra or not, and look at you blankly when you show enthusiasm regarding the collection of rings or coins. There are times though, and *Buzz!* is certainly one such occasion, where you need the support of those closest to you.

Buzz!: The Music Quiz is essentially a tool that fires a selection of usually unrecognisable music hits at you while you use one of the four buzzers included in the package to prove that you are better at recognising 'tunes' than the rest of your friends. It would be unfair to brand this as 'not fun' – it is, blatantly. Well, for a while anyway. The quiz layout and varied rounds provide a good base for this fun and, whether you like it or not, the competitiveness that dwells within us all soon rises to the surface and you find yourself enjoying the simplicity of it all.

Unfortunately, it's all rather short lived. The main problem is that there are only 1,000 different music clips accompanied by 5,000 questions. This means that after about five or six medium length games, you're already hearing repeats. We heard *Mmm, Mmm, Mmm, Mmm* by Crash Test Dummies – or something that sounded a bit like it, at least – three times in one morning. And as much as we like the song, that's pretty bad.

You may have got the impression that the songs aren't as audibly pleasing as they perhaps should be. Most sound as if they are being played on some form of 'My First Keyboard' that Tomy may of released in 1983 – this immediately made us favour the 'Only New Music' option as the combination of songs that were released ten years before our birth and the incessant plinking of a honky-tonk nightmare made things fairly difficult. Unfortunately, doing so halved the amount of tunes available and caused repeats to be an even more frequent event.



games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

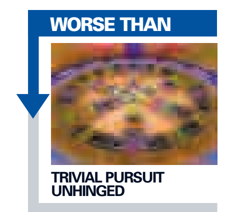
PUSH THE BUTTON: A brand new controller with a big red button makes things more interesting.
NAME THAT TUNE: *Buzz!* features some of the worst versions of famous songs we've ever heard.

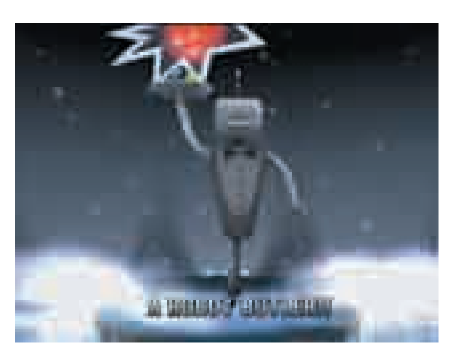
All this aside, *Buzz!* has its place. We can see dreary Sunday afternoons with the folks being made mildly tolerable with this and, as long as the game isn't removed from it's box too often and the pointless Single-player mode isn't touched, nobody will learn the answers too quickly and plenty of laughs will be had. Also, the fact that sport, movie and general knowledge versions are all on their way means that the buzzers will see a little more use. Let's just hope they cram a bit more content onto these future projects.

VERDICT 4/10
FUN BUT FLAWED

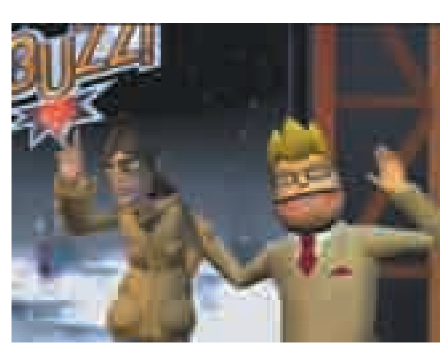
MONOPOLY PARTY

BETTER THAN

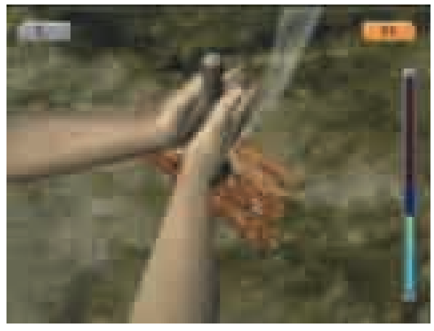
WORSE THAN

TRIVIAL PURSUIT UNHINGED

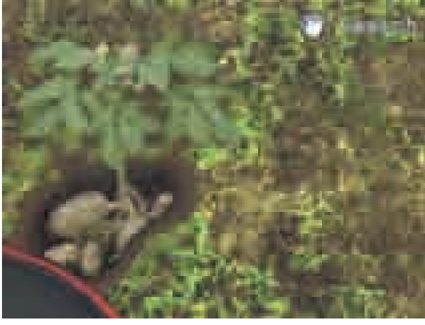

Big money, big prizes… all of which are pretty stupid, to be honest.


We use the term 'song' loosely when referring to the tunes in *Buzz!*



The contestants' celebration moves were chuckle-inducing, at least…


Ah, just like being in the Boy Scouts… only without the curiosity.


Until you've got a spear, you'll be eating potatoes – them's the breaks.


The island's reasonably huge and will take a fair while to explore fully.

A DESERT ISLAND GAME IF EVER THERE WAS ONE

LOST IN BLUE

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$34.99

RELEASE
Nov '05
(Jap/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

It's not often that a game slips entirely below the radar these days. Thanks to the Game Boy in all its iterations, however, handheld videogames have become so prolific that it's near-impossible to keep track of them all. For example, saying that *Lost In Blue* is the sequel to *Stranded Kids* (or *Survival Kids* in the US) will mean almost nothing to most of the population. Like many other high-quality but low-profile Game Boy Color releases, it was played and loved by a tiny proportion of the gaming population and completely ignored by everyone else.

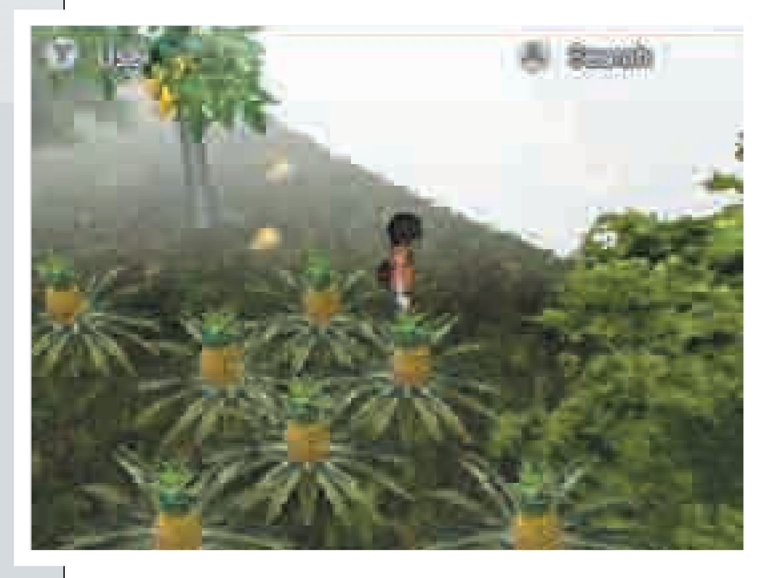
It's comforting, then, that *Lost In Blue* is a slightly higher profile release, because it doesn't deserve to be ignored. Centring upon the relationship between a teenage girl and boy washed up on a remote island and charged with the task of survival, the island is – at first – an enormous unknown. Through gradual exploration though, the player comes to know it well and makes use of its resources in order to ensure the survival and eventual absolution of the twin castaways.

Lost In Blue, it must be said, is an ingenious game. Fashioning tools from the island's natural materials in order to light fires, trap animals and catch fish is a well-implemented feature – and although there's a basic template for each sort of tool, creativity is often rewarded. The relationship between the two protagonists can also be quite touching, especially since the ending of the game is directly affected by how close the two survivors become.

However, the game is extremely slow-paced. Exploring requires a great deal of strength, which necessitates keeping your characters at home to rest for a few days, before setting out again. Make no mistake, this game cannot be rushed. It also has a propensity to become formulaic; many gamers will find that the constant foraging for food, materials and firewood quickly becomes laborious.

Others may fall in love with *Lost In Blue* as it has a certain appeal that's difficult to pinpoint. Much as the same routine of milking cows and harvesting crops in *Harvest Moon* takes a very long time to become tedious, the constant gradual exploration, the growing closeness between the two characters and the distant promise of escape featured in the game will be enough to keep players with the patience to fully enjoy this title interested. It won't appeal to everyone, but *Lost In Blue* is a solid and inventive title that shouldn't be allowed to slip past unnoticed.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
ROBINSON CRUSOE: Battling for your own survival – and your partner's – is no cakewalk. Hunting, gathering, foraging and fishing are the only things between you and a hungry, lonely death.



VERDICT 7/10
LABORIOUS IF YOU LET IT, BUT ULTIMATELY CHARMING

STRANDED KIDS

BETTER THAN

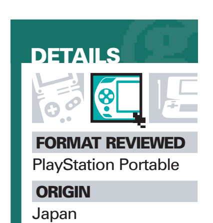
WORSE THAN

HARVEST MOON: FRIENDS OF MINERAL TOWN

A NEW EXCUSE TO CATCH THE 10:15 TO EXETER…

WINNING ELEVEN 9: UBIQUITOUS EVOLUTION

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
KCET

PRICE
¥5,500

RELEASE
11 November
(Jap: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

W*inning Eleven* on handheld is a long-coveted dream that has finally been realised with this bizarrely titled PlayStation Portable import. Incredibly, *Ubiquitous Evolution* has survived the shrinkage by keeping the very best elements of *Winning Eleven 9*. The one-touch football is present and correct, as is the responsiveness of the players, and it even plays just like the console version of *Winning Eleven*.

However, the reasons why *Ubiquitous Evolution* doesn't score the same as the PlayStation2 version are the controls and the slowdown. In downsizing the control scheme to fit the PSP's two shoulder buttons and single analogue stick, some of the extra moves have gone – no close control, no pirouettes on the ball, no analogue stick passes. These were arguably superfluous anyway but the cramped controls mean that, ultimately, you'll have to make a concession in the way you play.

Dribbling past defenders is tougher thanks to the ergonomics of the PSP, so you'll instinctively start looking for safer, open passes rather than intricate manoeuvres. It's not a failure, but an inevitable side-effect of squashing a multi-button control scheme into the PSP's confines. However, as you can learn to live with the quirks of the controls and given that the more important moves have made it to Sony's handheld intact – the one-two, the double-tap run and the chipped through ball – it's debatable whether the reworked controls will irk the majority of *Winning Eleven* players.

The same can't be said for the slowdown, though. In traditional *Winning Eleven* style, the camera shifts to display a side-on view for corners and free kicks. This is the only time the camera angle shifts to show most of the players on the field, and it's also the only time the PSP struggles to take it all in. Scoring from indirect free kicks is not an option and the same can be said for corners when it's impossible to capitalise on messy rebounds as the game engine grinds to a crawl. The problem is even worse when played on Wi-Fi multiplayer. With both players suffering slowdown on free kicks and corners, you'll see nothing happen for a few seconds before the action zips into Benny Hill mode, not giving you a chance to react before the danger has passed.

Nevertheless, this is a good start to Konami's *Winning Eleven* run on PSP. If the PAL conversion to *Pro Evolution Soccer* cleans up the slowdown, we'll undoubtedly have a championship contender on our hands.

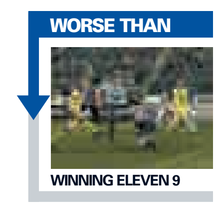
VERDICT 7/10
SOLID CONVERSION HELD BACK BY SLOWDOWN

WORLD TOUR SOCCER: CHALLENGE EDITION

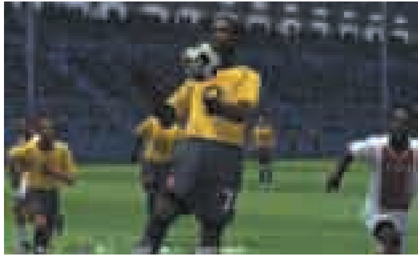


BETTER THAN

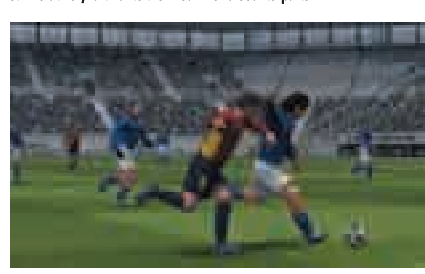
WORSE THAN



WINNING ELEVEN 9



Considering the slight drop in visual quality, the player likenesses are still relatively faithful to their real world counterparts.





Practically the same game filled with practically the same great goals. If only some technical problems didn't hamper it, we'd be incredibly happy.

games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
WHY-FI: You can play using Wi-Fi, but unfortunately this doesn't really compensate for the lack of a true Multiplayer mode, thanks to problems dealing with the game's slowdown.





Moving around each area from point to point just isn't the same as actually having to walk between places.



The combat may be relatively solid, but how come you don't have any control over your comrades? Bah.

THINGS WERE NEVER THE SAME AFTER PHIL COLLINS LEFT…

LUNAR GENESIS

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

DOUBLE TROUBLE: Choose whether to receive experience or spoils after each encounter.
TOUCH ME: Use the touch screen to quickly and easily cycle through menu options.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Rising Star

DEVELOPER
Game Arts

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

It's not unusual for early RPGs in any console's life to be slightly underwhelming. With their libraries of text and vast amounts of possibilities, developing a quality adventure is a time-consuming process and it's common to see a few stopgap titles popping up before the big guns roll out. But what's unfortunate is that a title such as *Lunar Genesis* has had to fill this role, rather than prove the success it should have been.

Genesis is riddled with little annoyances that wouldn't be so bad on their own, but get genuinely annoying en masse. For a start, you have to toggle between whether to get supplies and cards post-battle or take experience instead; an interesting concept, sure, but one that more or less ensures that you'll need to fight twice as many battles to get anywhere. Since you don't get any cash for winning battles, the only way to improve your armour and weapons is to take on delivery side-quests (which usually mean sacrificing experience to round up vast quantities of sundries), so wave goodbye to another couple of hours of dispatching the same few enemies and hoping they drop what you need. Even in battle, things are slightly limiting. You can't actually choose which of your foes to attack and whether set to Auto mode or not, the AI of your team is somewhat rubbish. Powerful characters will waste their attacks on weakened foes and your team is really reluctant to use items or magic even when on the brink of death.

The adventure plods along with little direction for the first few hours before it gathers any momentum. It takes persistence to trudge through the story when the combat system is so uninvolving, though. There's lots to do en route and *Lunar* makes good use of the DS's functionality – the touch screen works well for menus and quick button presses. Flying enemies and large creatures move onto the top screen while the microphone is used to get your party to run away.

This will tide die-hard RPG fans over until *Mario & Luigi* and the next *Pokémon* title, but anyone expecting the DS's first role-playing game to be anything more than average is in for bitter disappointment.



VERDICT 5/10

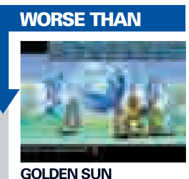
A FAIR, BUT QUITE LIMITED START FOR DS ADVENTURING

ETERNAL RING



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



GOLDEN SUN



They hear you knocking, but you can't come in – that'll teach you to forget your keys in the future.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
2K Games

DEVELOPER
PopTop

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4 (Online 2-4)

NOT AS EARTH-SHATTERING AS IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN

SHATTERED UNION

Whatever that certain breed of supercilious PC gamers might say, strategy games can work on consoles – a point which *Shattered Union* desperately tries to prove. PopTop has attempted to introduce consoles to a mix of accessible *Advance Wars*-style gameplay and the more serious treatment of war prevalent in PC military strategy games. Unfortunately, *Shattered Union* only adopts the *Advance Wars* dynamic in the loosest possible sense, as the game is – at least at the outset – terminally inaccessible. Console players chucked immediately into the complex world of warfare will have absolutely no idea what to do. The only hints you receive come in the form of three fast-paced, completely non-interactive tutorials which are exceptionally unhelpful in their far-too-quick delivery.

It doesn't help that initially all the units look similar and there's nothing to help distinguish between classes during a battle – you'll have to figure out from its stats and its name whether it's artillery or anti-air, medium armour or light armour. Even after several hours of play, units are easily confused, which can lead you to send the wrong unit into a fight – and there's no 'Undo' button if you mess up. When playing as two factions of similar colours, it can also be quite difficult to make out whose units are whose. This problem does ease as you get used to the units but is enough to put users off from the start.

Even if you do persevere and acquaint yourself with the battle system, though, you'll find that the game is too unbalanced to let you get very far. Campaign mode is extremely difficult due to the fact that any troops you send into battle have to sit the next skirmish out. What this leads to is the frustrating reality that every time you take a territory you'll probably lose another one because your troops are only at half strength, and because you rarely win any new territories you can never afford to replace lost units.

Ultimately, *Shattered Union* is just too frustrating to be enjoyable. Its accessibility problems are crippling, and even after you've got to grips with how the game works, it still feels unbalanced and confusing. PC RTS fans might find more to like here, but console players are advised to pass this by.

VERDICT 4/10
TOO SELF-INVOLVED TO BE MUCH FUN



games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
HUMAN INTELLIGENCE: Oddly enough, *Shattered Union* is more enjoyable against human opponents as there's a measure of equality in battles that's entirely absent in Campaign mode.

WRATH UNLEASHED
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN
COMMAND & CONQUER

PC £34.99



Though more or less identical to its console counterparts, having a mouse, keyboard and a higher resolution does help to make more sense of *Shattered Union* – the game is much more suited to a PC audience.



Air units are easy to distinguish because they fly, but it's not so easy to work out which ground unit is which.



The hexagonal layout just screams *Battle Isle*, which is no bad thing. But then, why not just play *Battle Isle*?


HANNAH . D
HOGG
JACK .
HOGG



Taxi for a Mr T Rex… **Cadillacs And Dinosaurs, Arcade (Capcom), 1992**


eMag


RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.38 NOV 2005
00p
THE MONTHLY OLD-SCHOOL SOFTWARE REVIEW
BEHIND THE SCENES – SHADOW OF THE BEAST
GOLDENEYE
N64 pads at the ready – we return to one of the greatest console first-person shooters ever made…
SIN & PUNISHMENT
Treasure's Nintendo 64 masterpiece revisited…
RETRO ROUNDUP
We take an in-depth look at Sonic Gems, Taito Legends and Capcom Classics
PLUS
RETRO REVIEWS,
RETRO NEWS,
WORST LICENCE EVER,
BUYERS' GUIDE,
ULTIMATE COLLECTION,
RETRO CONTACT
AND MUCH MORE…

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

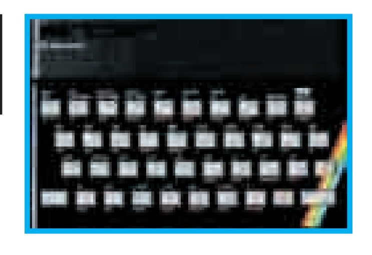
You can tell that Christmas is fast approaching. Washed up singers from yesteryear are starting to release those novelty albums where they sing along to some of their favourite hits (note: they're hardly ever their own); *The X-Factor* has turned my wife and eldest daughter into the sort of mindless creatures that would inhabit a George A Romero flick; and an endless barrage of toy adverts are emptying my wallet quicker than my daughter can say, "I want that one, daddy."

Yup, the festive season is well and truly on its way and this particular goose is getting fat, but I'm also rather ecstatic as I have a ridiculous amount of compilations to play through. Now, don't get me wrong – I'll be there at midnight along with the rest of the 'hardcore' early adopters to pick up my shiny new Xbox 360, but it's still not going to stop me from going back to the likes of *Final Fight, Bubble Bobble* and *Sonic CD. Taito Legends, Sonic Gems* and *Capcom Classics* are all up for review this issue and feature the very best (not to mention the worst) of the current compilations that are now available; and judging from recent news, more packs are set to follow in the new year. Roll on 2006…



Darran Jones, Retro Editor

BOOK 'EM DANNO…



WE SPEAK TO THE AUTHOR OF THE NEW ZX SPECTRUM BOOK DUE AT THE END OF THE YEAR

Retro gamers are well catered for as far as books go, and many subjects have been covered over the last few months (look out for a review roundup soon). Many are of a high standard, but the one we're looking forward to is the excellent-looking *The ZX Spectrum Book* by Andrew Rollings. Hopefully out by the end of the year, the book has high production values, and is being self-published by Rollings. Eager to find out more, we phoned him up for a chat about his latest creation.

games™: How long have you been working on the book?

Rollings: The book started off as an idea bouncing around the back of my head for about four years. I started it as a project to become more familiar with XML/XSL technologies – the book layout and TOC generation is all XML driven. I never really intended to publish it but as I progressed it occurred to me that I'd put in enough effort it would be a shame not to try. After some number crunching I found out that it wouldn't be financially disastrous to self-publish, and quickly forged ahead with my new project. I view the book as a kind of 'homage' to the Spectrum, and a service to those who grew up with it, so making lots of money wasn't so important. Fortunately, the pre-orders I've already received have offset the bulk of the printing costs.

g™: Why the Spectrum?

AR: Well, it was the computer I grew up using and I had plenty of fond memories of it. I've been an active participant in the comp.sys.sinclair newsgroup, so I also knew there were plenty other people out there with the same warped interests. The existence of a regular Retro section in **games™** magazine seems to prove my point.

g™: Do you still plan to release it by the end of the year?

AR: It's important to me that the book is as high quality as possible – so I'm not cutting any corners, either in the printing quality, or in the time I spend writing and editing. Originally the plan was to finish writing at the end of September and spend October editing but I've never been any good at estimating how long it will take to write a book – even with several other published titles. So now I'm thinking that I should be able to wrap up the writing by maybe the end of October/early November – and assuming that the printer isn't too tied up with Christmas stuff, it should be out toward the end of the year.



▲ xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

g™: Are you considering any similar titles in the future?

AR: Well, if this one sells enough to make it financially viable then the answer is a resounding, 'yes'. It's a fun process to play old games and write about them. However for future books, I will look to collaborate with others who have more familiarity in the subject area: ie, for computers such as the Commodore 64, and consoles such as the NES, to which I only had limited exposure.

■ *The ZX Spectrum Book* should be available by the end of the year and can be pre-ordered from http://www.zxgoldenyears.com



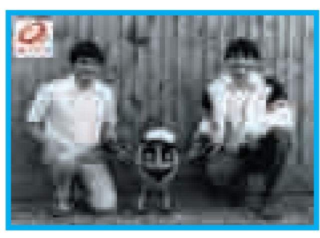
THE OLIVER TWINS SPONSOR RETRO BALL AND LAUNCH PROGRAMMING COMPETITION

CALLING ALL PROGRAMMERS

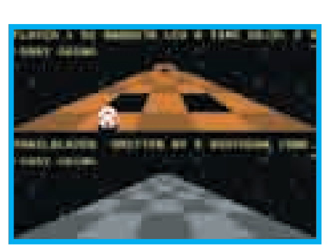
The Retro Ball received a massive boost this month when co-organiser Chris Wilkins revealed that the charity event is receiving new sponsorship from the Oliver Twins.

As well as sponsoring the ball the Twins will also be using the weekend to openly advertise Blitz Games and its current programmer vacancies. As a result the twins will be running a competition with some very desirable prizes. After witnessing the various *Dizzy* remakes at www.retroremakes.co.uk the Twins (in collaboration with Retro Ball) have set up a competition to allow would-be programmers to show off their skills. To enter, all you need to do is program a classic game (or your own if you're brave enough) and send it to oddbob@retroremakes.com. Any programming language can be used, but ideally, the Twins are looking for titles that have been created in C+ or C++. Original concepts are also favoured, as this will allow them to guage your creativity. The closing date for the competition is 16 November, so get those thinking caps on. The three top games will be playable at the Retro Ball, and a ceremony will take place on the evening of 3 December with the eventual winner walking away with a brand new Xbox 360. However, all three final authors will also be assessed throughout the day by Blitz staff, if their assessment is suitable they'll be offered the opportunity to work at Blitz Games.

With the event's financial and PR support supplied by Blitz Games, Wilkins is now free to concentrate on making the weekend event as successful as possible. He has already secured a large number of videogame celebrities to join in with the 48-hour-long gaming session. Archer Maclean, Jon Hare, Rob Hubbard, Andy Nuttall, Ben Daglish, Mark (Mad Fiddler) Knight and of course the Oliver Twins to name but a few of the developers and musicians who will be attending, and Wilkins is hoping to attract many more. It may only be a few short weeks away now, but the Retro Ball is already looking like another essential UK retro show. Tickets are selling extremely well, and are in limited supply, so make sure you contact www.play4charity.co.uk and reserve yours right now.



▲ With the Oliver Twins behind it, the Retro Ball is really starting to gather some pace. We can't wait.



▲ Think you can make a game as good as this is less than a month? You'd better get programming…

Retro DIARY

As old-school gaming gets increasingly more popular, it's about time everyone knew about upcoming retro releases and events…

NOVEMBER '05

Capcom Classics Collection

Date: 18 November **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £19.99 **Format:** PS2/Xbox

Another 'Best Of' retro compilation from Capcom, and if you've read our review you'll know that it's worth a purchase. While many of the games have been available on the PSX and Saturn's *Capcom Generations*, the addition of *Final Fight* and *Forgotten Worlds* makes this more appealing.

Tecmo Classic Arcade

Date: 28 November **Publisher:** Tecmo **Price:** £19.99 **Format:** PS2/Xbox

Tecmo has an interesting compilation lined up for the end of the year. While it has some highly addictive games on it including *Bomb Jack* and *Solomon's Key*, many titles are quite obscure. What about *Shadow Warriors, Gemini Wing, Silk Worm*? They're easily some of Tecmo's best arcade games, yet are all missing. Still, there are 11 other titles on offer, so let's hope that they turn out to be damn good value for money.

DECEMBER '05

The Retro Ball

Dates: 3-4 December **Location:** The Wardens Cricket Club, Kenilworth

Price: Saturday £7.50; Sunday £5; Weekend £10.00

As this marathon gaming event draws ever closer, we're preparing for what promises to be a very long weekend and practicing our games, digging out those old tapes for our heroes to sign, and trying to work out how much alcohol we can consume before we lose the ability to hold a joypad. It's gonna be great.

Namco Museum 50th Anniversary Arcade Collection

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Namco **Price:** TBA **Format:** PS2/Xbox

The Xbox and PlayStation2 get a dose of old-school arcade action with this collection of 14 Namco titles. The likes of P*ac-Man, Galaxian* and *Pole Position* jostle for space with *Rolling Thunder* and *Galaga*. Namco has even included plenty of classy Eighties tunes to sing along to. Anyone know the words to *Come On Eileen*?

JANUARY '06

Capcom Classics Collection

Dates: TBA **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** TBA **Format:** PSP

No, this isn't a printing error. The PS2 and Xbox versions aren't even out yet and Capcom has announced that its excellent new Retro compilation will be appearing on the PSP (hopefully, at the beginning of next year). Best of all, though, is the announcement that it will include two exclusive new games, *Side Arms: Hyper Dyne* and the excellent *Strider*.

Sega's Treasure Box

Dates: TBA **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** TBA **Format:** PS2

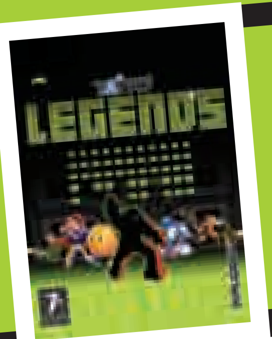
Details are still sketchy but we can tell you that *Treasure Box* is set to include some of Treasure's greatest 16-bit moments. *Gunstar Heroes, Dynamite Headdy* and *Alien Soldier* have been confirmed, but we hope more games will be added. Hell, we'd give our neighbour's left kidney (ours is much to valuable) for Treasure's complete back catalogue on one shiny disc. Let's just hope Sega doesn't disappoint.

If you know of, or are hosting, any retro events, please contact the Retro Editor at darran.jones@highburygroup.com



Retro Review

T•A•I•T•O L•E•G•E•N•D•S



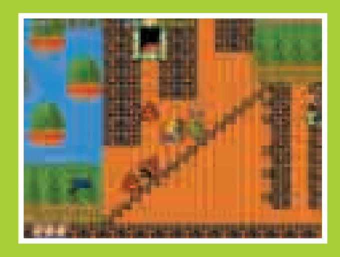
With *Joukan* and *Gekan* already available in Japan, it's now Europe's turn to receive some retro lovin' from the creators of *Space Invaders*. Forget some of the comments you may have heard on various forums, though, because *Taito Legends* easily deserves a nice little spot on your coveted gaming shelf. And this certainly isn't an inferior UK rip-off. Okay, so granted, it might not have those rare Saturn titles such as *Elevator Action Returns* and *Cleopatra Fortune* on it and the lack of light gun support may seem particularly annoying, but this is still a must-have compilation. Just look at the games available and see for yourself… Oh, and just so you know, don't even bother looking for anything on *Bubble Bobble* and *Rastan* – we already covered those last month. Some of these titles should keep you occupied as the long, cold winter evenings begin to draw in, though…

TAITO'S LATEST COMPILATION PROVES TO BE A DEFINITE CASE OF 'THIRD TIME LUCKY'

SYSTEM: Xbox, PlayStation2, PC **PRICE:** £19.99 **PUBLISHER:** Taito **DEVELOPER:** In-House

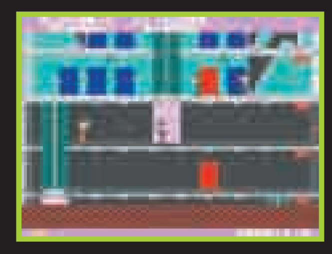
THE NEW ZEALAND STORY

Taito is well known for its cute platformers and *The New Zealand Story* is no exception. As with *Bubble Bobble, TNZS* features sickly sweet visuals, simple controls and some fiendishly addictive gameplay. Unlike the single-screen antics of Bub and Bob, Tiki the Kiwi's adventure takes place across a scrolling playfield littered with a variety of nauseatingly adorable opponents. The level design throughout is superb – many of the bosses are a joy to face off against, and it features one of the most cheerful ditties we've ever heard. A worthy addition and no mistake.



ELEVATOR ACTION

Typical isn't it? Those Japanese gamers get the astounding *Elevator Action Returns,* while us Brits have to make do with the inferior original. However, despite not being anywhere near the same league as its superior sequel (after all, it is 11 years older) it's still possible to have plenty of retro fun with *Elevator Action*. Granted, the controls sometimes tend to feel a little clunky and it's certainly not as easy to enter doors as we'd like, but these are minor problems that don't detract (too much) from sneaking around each building and plugging away at various enemies. Great stuff.



NINJA KIDS

While there are actually only a few scrolling beat-'em-ups to be found on the *Taito Legends* compilation, this crazy romp is certainly the one that's most worthy of your attention. Similar in style to Konami's excellent *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* arcade games, *Ninja Kids* features an abundance of over the top humour, hordes of opponents to fight and some extremely kooky-looking bosses. We will grant you that *Ninja Kids* is extremely limited and you'll finish it in less than an hour with infinite continues, but *Ninja Kids* is still so enjoyable you'll be having far too much of a good time to care. Don't pass this up…



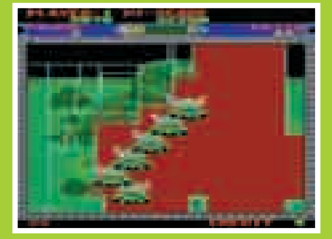
PHOENIX

Never mind the fact that it's aesthetically hideous by today's standards – *Phoenix* remains a classy but incredibly tough shooter. Playing like a cross between *Galaxian* and *Galaga, Phoenix* takes place over several different waves and requires you to take out as many birds and eggs as you can; once a certain number of waves have been defeated you then get to face-off against a primitive-looking but tough-as-nails boss. If you're looking for a fast no-thrills shooter to test your reflexes – not to mention your luck – to the limit then check out *Phoenix*. We guarantee you won't be disappointed.



SUPER QIX

The simplest ideas often make for the best games, and *Super Qix* is a perfect example. It's basically a turbo-charged version of *Qix* (which is available on *Taito's Gekan* compilation) and is both wonderfully addictive and hellishly frustrating to play. As with *Qix*, the aim of the game is to uncover a certain percentage of each screen by drawing boxes of various shapes. In this edition, *Taito* has given the game a graphical facelift and added plenty of power-ups to mess around with. *Volfied* is also available on the compilation and plays very similarly but with a space theme.



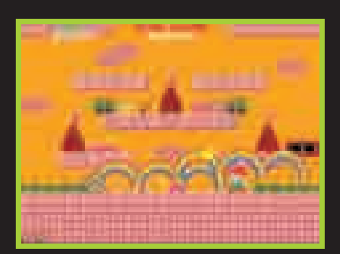
ZOO KEEPER

Once you get past *Zoo Keeper's* jarring sound effects you should discover one of *Taito Legends*' many hidden gems. For each level you have to secure a group of animals by running around the outside of their enclosures, filling in any gaps that have appeared. Once a specific amount of time has elapsed you will receive some bonus points for any trapped animals that remain; it's an extremely simple concept but one that works beautifully. As with its web-based counterpart *Zoo Keeper* is score-based and you'll soon be creating all sorts of strategies to ensure those pesky animals don't escape.



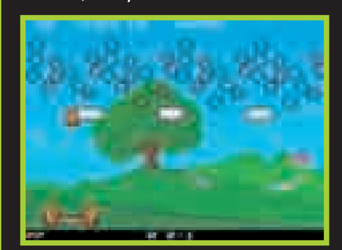
RAINBOW ISLANDS

It's not often us Brits get one over on the Japanese, but the inclusion of *Rainbow Islands* got us very excited. Indeed, as soon as the disc finished loading it was the first game we played, and luckily it's still as great as we remember. The play mechanics are spot on and the visuals are gorgeous, but the sound… well, actually that's the one disappointment – the jazzed up rendition of *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* is no longer used. Still, when you've got a game that's as amazing to play as *Rainbow Islands* it's a letdown that you can easily learn to live with.



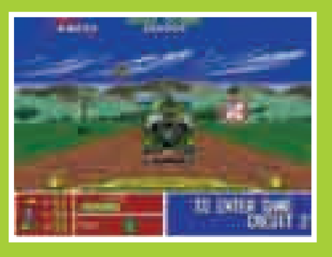
PLUMP POP

Like last month's *PuLiRuLa*, we've included *Plump Pop* more for its novelty value than because it's an exceptionally amazing game. Playing somewhat like *Arkanoid* (a title that's been criminally overlooked on all three compilations), the objective in *Plump Pop* is to use a trampoline to bounce your kitten, puppy or piglet – no really, this is what you have to do – into a wall of bubbles. While *Plump Pop* is reasonably good fun to play, it's sadly let down by a lack of control. The original game used a dial, which hasn't been replicated very well at all and you'll often find yourself zipping past your little piglet. Shame, really.



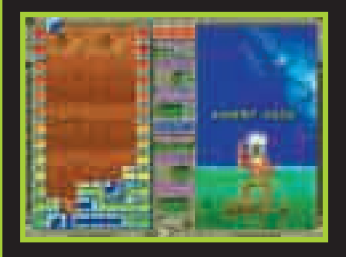
OPERATION THUNDERBOLT

Sadly neither *Operation Wolf* nor its superior sequel *Operation Thunderbolt* use light gun support – instead you use a cursor to dictate the on-screen action. After adjusting the sensitivity, you discover that both games still have plenty to offer – even if they no longer look as good as they once did. While *Operation Wolf* features simple side-scrolling levels, *Thunderbolt* delivers new stages that see you racing into the screen and taking out an alarming number of politically incorrect terrorists. Despite the lack of light gun support, both titles remain strong, solid blasters.



TUBE IT

Like *Cleopatra Fortune*, *Tube It* is one of those puzzlers that's hard to get to grips with initially, but once everything has clicked into place, you'll find yourself hopelessly addicted and begging for more. Playing like a cross between *Tetris* and *PipeMania*, the aim of *Tube It* is to manipulate falling pieces of pipe and connect them all together. Once connected, the pipes disappear and – if you're lucky – trigger off huge chain reactions. Clear a set amount and you'll move onto the next stage. It certainly takes a while to get used to this game but perseverance definitely pays off here.



AND THE REST

BUBBLE BOBBLE
COLONY 7
CONTINENTAL CIRCUS
ELECTRIC YO-YO
EXZISUS
GLADIATOR
GREAT SWORDSMAN
JUNGLE HUNT
PLOTTING
RASTAN
RETURN OF THE INVADERS
SPACE INVADERS
SPACE INVADERS PART 2
THUNDERFOX
TOKIO
VOLFIED

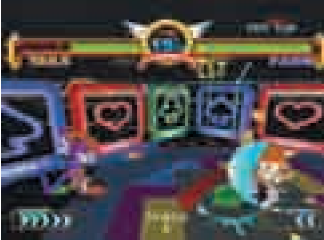
SUMMING UP

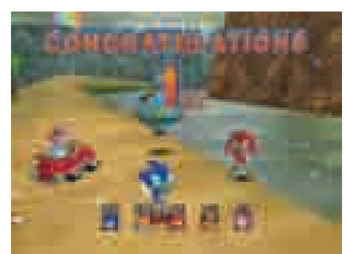
It may not feature the sort of expensive Saturn conversions that made the Japanese compilations so desirable, but *Taito Legends* remains an essential collection for any non-importing retro fans. While some of the games are fairly poor, the majority are of an extremely high standard and are still perfectly playable. The lack of any online scoring is something of a disappointment and there's not as much behind-the-scenes info as we would have liked, but *Taito Legends* is the third hit in a row for the Japanese software company. One day, all compilations will be like this…

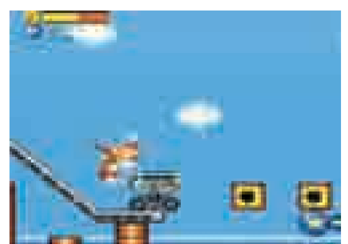
OVERALL 85%











SONIC GEMS COLLECTION™

Format: PlayStation2, GameCube
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Various
Price: £29.99
Games: Sonic CD, Sonic The Fighters, Sonic R, Sonic Drift 2, Sonic Spinball, Sonic The Hedgehog 2, Sonic The Hedgehog: Triple Trouble, Tails Adventures, Tails' Sky Patrol Vectorman, Vectorman 2

Sonic Gems – ah we see what you've done there, Sega. Sonic collects Chaos Emeralds and an emerald is a precious stone or gem, so you're suggesting that this new compilation is just as coveted. Very clever indeed. What a shame then that the games on offer in this second collection don't really deserve the comparison – *Sonic Fool's Gold* would perhaps be a more apt title.

Don't get us wrong, *Sonic Gems* is still a decent anthology, it's just that it doesn't contain anywhere near as many hits as last year's superior effort. Still, what it does contain is *Sonic CD* – easily one of Sonic's greatest 2D outings. Indeed, not a month seems to go by without us harping on about Sonic's only Mega CD outing, so now you can finally find out what all the fuss is about.

Traveller's Tales built on the success of the original Mega Drive titles by using the Mega CD's disc-based medium to create some excellent music and massive, sprawling levels. Sure, you can simply race through each zone as quickly as possible, but consider the sheer number of secrets cunningly hidden around each stage and it really pays to do a little exploration. If you're looking for some classic Sonic action then *Sonic CD* doesn't disappoint – it's just a shame Sega has pawned us off with the inferior US soundtrack and not the funky tunes available on the original Japanese and English versions.

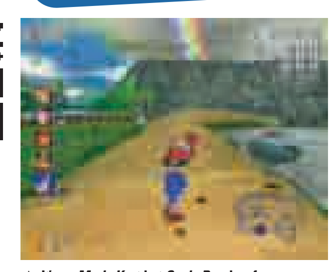
Next up is *Sonic The Fighters* – the only game on the compilation that's never actually received a home conversion. While it features plenty of forgettable characters, there's no denying that it's a fun game to play. The gameplay for *Sonic The Fighters* is never going to give *Virtua Fighter 4 Evo* sleepless nights (it actually plays very much like a simplified *Fighting Vipers*) but you'll still find a surprising amount of depth in this vibrant-looking beat-'em-up. Smashing Tails in the face with an oversized fist, or repeatedly using Bean's headbutt to down a foe is always good value for money, and then, of course, you have that amazing 'pop pop' sound effect that accompanies Fang the Sniper's cheese gun. Marvellous stuff.

Once you've had your fill of battering rodents senseless, *Sonic R* allows you to take your frustration out on the racetrack. While it originally appeared on Sega's Saturn, this version of *Sonic R* is a port of the PC title. As a result, the graphics and draw distance have been greatly improved, but most of the Saturn's cool graphical effects (such as the great transparencies) are nowhere to be seen. Luckily, the superb soundtrack remains untouched and you'll soon be humming along to *Can You Feel The Sunshine* as you hurtle around the superbly designed tracks.

As with last year's *Mega Collection Plus, Sonic Gems* contains a fair selection of Game Gear titles, bringing the total number of Sonic games up to nine. Sadly, all six would have been better off on the Game Gear, as blowing them up to fit a TV screen doesn't do them justice at all. It's certainly nice to have them for collection's sake but *Triple Trouble* is the only title that you're likely to return to for any length of time. Hell, we've even been short-changed on the bonus games front. While lucky Japanese owners get the complete *Streets Of Rage* trilogy, we end up with *Vectorman 1* and *2* – thanks a bunch, Sega. Certainly, *Sonic Gems* is bound to please Sonic fans – if only for the inclusion of *Sonic CD* – but sadly, it doesn't offer anywhere near the same value for money as more recent compilations.



▲ *Sonic The Fighters* is just plain silly, although it can still be quite a laugh to behold.



▲ It's no *Mario Kart*, but *Sonic R* makes for a welcome addition to the collection.

OVERALL SCORE 67%

▼ At least, the elusive *Sonic CD* makes an appearance… and it's not even a rubbish PC conversion. Ace.





Think Fast.

C'mon faster. Because here comes Sonic The Hedgehog.™ He's the fastest critter the world has ever seen, and he's a hedgehog with a major attitude.

Watch him smirk in the face of danger as he blazes his way through hilly pastures, underwater caverns, marble ruins, strange cities and a cybernetic world of enemies in a race to save his buddies.

Sonic's got everything a hedgehog could ever want: tricks, gadgets and speed. So don't blink or you might just miss him. Sonic is sold separately or included when you buy a Sega® Genesis 16-bit system.



Leading the 16-bit revolution.™







SONIC THE HEDGEHOG (Mega Drive) Sonic Team, 1991 – US Advertisement



Retro Review

C•A•P•C•O•M C•L•A•S•S•I•C•S



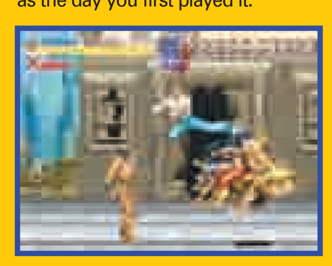
Considering Capcom's rich arcade heritage, it's somewhat upsetting that it still insists on releasing the same old titles. There's no denying that *Capcom Classics Collection* has a staggering amount of great-name games on it, but – bar a few titles – this latest compendium of retro games is almost identical to the *Capcom Generations* range that has already been released on the Saturn and PlayStation. Mind you, having said that, many of the titles that feature here on *Capcom Classics* are brilliant and when you have a collection of titles like *Commando, Final Fight, Forgotten Worlds, Mercs, Super Ghouls 'N' Ghosts* and *Street Fighter II* appearing on one handy disc, complaining seems a bit churlish. Fortunately, the compilation is saved by some fantastic presentation and an incredibly low price (something many other titles are benefittingn from. If only Capcom had remembered to include *Strider*…

CAPCOM JUMPS ON THE RETRO BANDWAGON AND DELIVERS A SUPERB COLLECTION OF HITS

SYSTEM: PlayStation2, Xbox **PRICE:** £19.99 **PUBLISHER:** Capcom **DEVELOPER:** Digital Eclipse/Capcom

FINAL FIGHT

Capcom is the master of the scrolling beat-'em-up and *Final Fight* is undoubtedly one of its greatest. Taking control of Guy, Cody or Hagger, the aim of the game is simple: clean up the streets of Metro City and rescue Hagger's kidnapped daughter. Thanks to its huge, bold sprites and impressive design, *Final Fight* still manages to look fantastic. Its gameplay has also weathered the years, and while there are only two buttons, it's possible to pull off a variety of spectacular moves (especially when playing as ex-wrestler Hagger). Never mind the fact that it's over 15 years old – *Final Fight*'s still as good as the day you first played it.



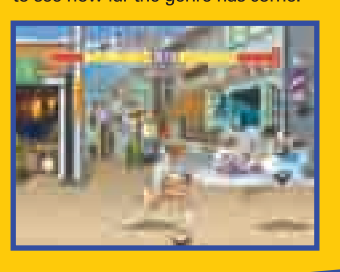
FORGOTTEN WORLDS

***Forgotten Worlds* is typical Capcom – huge muscle-bound protagonists, a unique graphic design alive with detailed sprites, and polished, challenging gameplay.** Despite appearing on several home systems over the years, *Forgotten Worlds* has often been let down by its complex control system (you fire in different directions with a dial on the arcade version). Fortunately, Digital Eclipse has included two options (rotate your gun by using either the face buttons or right analogue stick) which allows you to simply concentrate on the frenetic on-screen action.



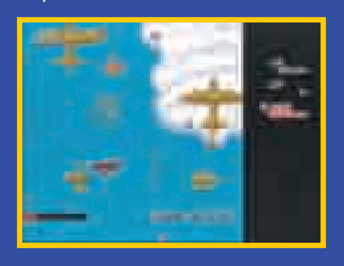
STREET FIGHTER II: HYPER FIGHTING

We've said it before, but *Street Fighter II* just isn't that good anymore and playing *Hyper Fighting* does nothing to alter our opinion. Released in the UK as *Street Fighter II Turbo, Hyper Fighting* offers some new moves, a selection of different character costumes and a much-needed speed boost. Sadly though, the 2D fighter has progressed a fair distance in the last 14 years and Capcom's once superb fighter has long since been eclipsed. It's easily the best *Street Fighter* outing on the compilation, though, and is worth playing if only to see how far the genre has come.



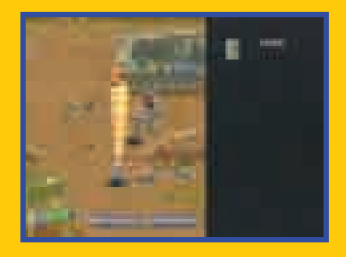
1943 KAI

While 1942 and 1943 have both been included on *Capcom Classics Collection, we thought we'd focus on* the superior *1943 Kai*. Released only in Japan, *1943 Kai* was an enhanced update of the original *1943* but featured a much tougher challenge due to its extremely unpredictable enemies and refined weapon system. The visuals retain their crisp, unique look (even if many of the bosses are very similar to each other) and while it's starting to look a little past it now, it's streets ahead of *1942*. It's also incredibly tough so don't expect to single credit it anytime soon.



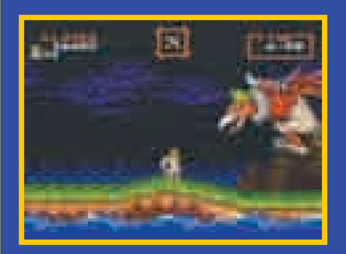
MERCS

The spiritual successor to *Commando, Mercs* saw you take control of one of three beefcakes and raise merry hell as you attempted to rescue the US president. Unlike *Commando*, it was possible for three players to play at once (something that's been faithfully translated to the PlayStation2) and the end of each stage featured a suitably over-the-top boss to destroy. It was also possible to commandeer a variety of different vehicles and while the first few stages were relatively easy to complete, later levels got ridiculously tough and offered a serious challenge.



SUPER GHOULS 'N' GHOSTS

Fans of Sir Arthur prepare to be happy as *Capcom Classics* features arcade-perfect conversions of both *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* and the superior *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*. Amazingly both titles have been eclipsed by the inclusion of the fantastic *Super Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*. It may have been an early SNES title, but Sir Arthur's 16-bit quest is still a memorable experience, mainly due to its superb level design and hauntingly beautiful soundtrack. It also looks fantastic, with some wonderfully detailed sprites and stunning use of Mode 7. A real highlight for the compilation.



SECTION Z

***Section Z* was the original game in Capcom's *Jet-Pack Heroes* trilogy (the others being *Side Arms – Hyper Dyne* and *Forgotten Worlds*) and this first title gives an early indication of how the series would later progress.** While it looks pretty drab by today's standards and features simple-looking sprites and rather dull level design, it's saved by its intense gameplay. Despite the hectic on-screen action, the novel control system (press a button to face left or right) makes it relatively easy to take down opponents. It's a strong shooter, eclipsed by the superior *Forgotten Worlds*.



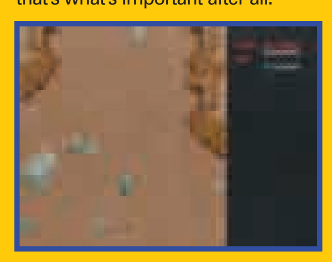
BIONIC COMMANDO

Often confused with *Captain Commando, Bionic Commando* is a great platformer with interesting play mechanics and strong visuals. The most notable aspect of the game is your huge bionic arm. Unable to jump around each level, you have to use your arm as a grapple hook to reach high platforms, destroy wooden crates, swing across chasms, or even push back enemies. The first few levels are tricky, but once you've mastered the controls you'll soon be applauding *Bionic Commando* for its super level design and excellent gameplay.



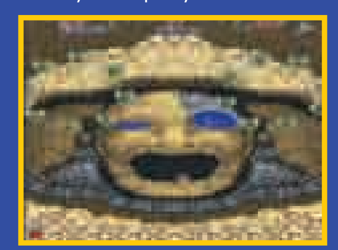
COMMANDO

***Commando* was one of the earliest up-the-screen shooters, and while it may look a little rough around the edges, it plays like a dream.** Actually, make that a nightmare. Yes, you've guessed it – *Commando* is another really difficult addition to the *Capcom Classics* range, and after just a few plays your nerves will be shattered, and your thumbs seriously bruised. Despite its trickiness, *Commando* is refreshingly enjoyable to play and has that 'one more go' factor to ensure that you constantly go back to it time and again. It may look drab but the gameplay still shines, and that's what's important after all.



LEGENDARY WINGS

Here we have yet another title that was not released previously on *Capcom Generations*, and – much like football – *Legendary Wings* is a game of two halves. Each level initially starts off with your flying angel shooting down wave after wave of enemies in typical shoot-'em-up fashion. However, once you get to a certain stage, you'll find yourself in a much more traditional side-on view and must take out a whole variety of monsters, while jumping over gaps and climbing up ladders. It's an interesting mix of styles which actually works pretty well.



AND THE REST

1942
1943
GHOSTS 'N' GOBLINS
GHOULS 'N' GHOSTS
SONSON
EXED EXES
HIGEMARU
VULGUS
GUN SMOKE
TROJAN
STREET FIGHTER II
STREET FIGHTER II: WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION

SUMMING UP

While *Capcom Classics Collection* could be criticised for being a simple re-packaging of the *Capcom Generations* series, you can't deny that it's a strong compilation. Presentation throughout is superb, and 22 games for less than £20 is value for money in anyone's book. It's frustrating that the television-turning Tate mode option has disappeared (especially as it was available in *Capcom Generations*) but at least Digital Eclipse offers a reasonable alternative. Let's just hope Capcom releases a similar pack next year.

OVERALL 82%

Hardware Leg



MACHINE SPECIFICATIONS

PROCESSOR: MOS Technology 6510
LAUNCH PRICE: £350 in 1982
SPEED: 1MHz
MEMORY: 64K RAM upgradable to 320K with a Commodore 1764 256K RAM expansion unit. Yet only 64K was directly accessible. There was just under 39K of memory free since the rest was used for internal functions such as the operating system
SOUND: SID 6581, three channels of sound
GRAPHICS CAPABILITIES: MOS Technology VIC-II chip was capable of 16 colours and a character matrix of 40 x 25. Eight hardware sprites and 256 user-defined characters
SIZE 404 x 216 x 75mm
WEIGHT 1280g



COMMODORE 64

A chip known as Sid, a man named Jack and a magazine called Zzap!64. David Crookes looks back at the legacy of the Commodore 64

Gamers loved the Eighties and that heavyweight battle that was fought between the Sinclair and Commodore. Even today the scrap still rages in some quarters (as seen in **games™**'s Clash Of The Titans features), the fierce fanboy-inspired debates were more than just squabbles – they were all-out war.

Clive Sinclair geared up to sell scores of ZX81s, so with Commodore equally eager with its VIC-20, the seeds of battle were sown. Sinclair wanted an educational machine while Jack Tramiel the president of Commodore wanted a low-end home computer for serious tasks like word processing, but which would also appeal to gamers.

Tramiel was a Polish Jew who survived Auschwitz and went on to found Commodore as a typewriter repair service in New York in 1953. Once the computer era kicked off, his dream was to create a popular affordable machine. And his slogan? "Computers for the masses, not the classes." Commodore initially tapped into the computer market in 1977 with PET (Personal Electronic Transactor). It was based around the 6502 processor running at 1MHz and initially offered upto 8Kb of memory and a monochrome monitor. But while that machine went on to spawn a series of PET successors, it was the VIC-20 that established Commodore as an emerging home computer giant, and in 1982 it became the first computer to sell over a million units.

The VIC-20 was ultimately a cheaper version of the PET; it had a full-stroke keyboard, a 16K ROM with built in Basic language, 5K RAM, graphics at 184 x 176, three-octave sound and a joystick port. Yet the machine's low cost and colourful graphics guaranteed its success, introducing many people to a gaming industry where graphics and sound were becoming all-important. At its peak, 9,000 VIC-20s rolled off the production line every day.

This paved the way for the Commodore 64. The machine that became the Toronto-based firm's most successful computer, entering the *Guinness Book Of Records* for selling 30 million units between 1982 and 1993. It launched in January 1982 at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, and was an instant hit; Commodore magazine Canada called it, "A spectacular breakthrough." Reports stated that Atari executives were amazed it could be produced for $595. Initially aimed at serious users, the C64 didn't take long to spark gamers' interests, particularly when titles like *Sea Wolf* and *Fast Eddie* emerged in 1982, with better classics such as *Frogger* on the horizon.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN...

At the time, Commodore felt gamers were well catered for due to the availability of game consoles from the likes of Atari, but for every parent who bought a C64, there were kids who wanted to use it to play games. Tapes were affordable for children and so the machine slowly became a strong games contender; consoles, meanwhile, were sticking with more expensive cartridges. Sure enough, Commodore realised the gaming potential of its machine and began selling it in toy shops and department stores. In many cases it went head-to-head with the consoles and sales soared. Despite this potential, Tramiel wanted the C64 to be taken seriously as an up-market VIC-20. Both did look similar, but it was necessary for Commodore to produce a new machine due to growing competition, particularly from Sinclair which had achieved success with the ZX80 and was now looking to dominate the world with the ZX81.

Hardware Legend



PERIPHERALS

■ The Commodore 64 had many add-ons, the most popular of which were the joystick (a particular favourite being the Competition Pro) and mouse (great for playing *Arkanoid*). It was also possible to plug in a floppy disc drive to replace the Datasettes which loaded tapes. At first the 5.25-inch housebrick-sized 1541 and 1571 drives were all the rage until the 3.5-inch 1581 drive became available, making loading easier and faster (although the 1541 was slow due to a poor serial bus on the C64 until a piece of software called FastLoad by Epyx helped to speed things up).

■ Other peripherals included printers for word processing or a Commodore 1701 13-inch colour monitor for better display (quite why they chose such an unlucky number for the screen size is anyone's guess when 14-inch was pretty much a standard). You could also buy a modem to access bulletin boards and online games – perfect for people who wanted to squeeze a little more from their machines. However, there was also a piracy problem with some System Operators (known as Sysops) putting up cracked software for download.



The Commodore 64's strongest selling point was arguably its memory capacity, with 64K RAM plus a custom sound chip and 16 colours. It boasted a full-stroke keyboard with 66 keys and four function keys, and was based around the 6510 processor with a speed of just under 1MHz for the PAL versions and just over that for NTSC. But what marked the C64 out from its competitors was the easy to use Sound Interface Device (SID) sound processor designed by Bob Yannes. The computer was a serious machine for musicians and game programmers, and it enhanced games considerably with its capacity for three voices, nine octaves and four waveforms. To obtain sound, the programmer had to poke values into specific memory locations rather than use traditional sound and envelope commands. It simulated instruments perfectly, rivalling sythesizers and meaning a piano or cymbals could be accurately replicated, as could gunshots or the roar of a jet engine.

"THE C64 ENTERED THE GUINNESS BOOK OF RECORDS FOR SELLING 30 MILLION UNITS BETWEEN 1982 AND 1993"

The sound chip led programmers to compose some of the best music for games ever heard. Among these composers were Rob Hubbard and Martin Galway, and such was their popularity that it was believed some games sold in great quantities purely because people wanted to hear their work. Hubbard was behind the music for *Monty On The Run, IK+* and *Delta,* while Galway composed the tunes that accompanied *Wizball,* among others. It also became possible to sample sounds, one of the best examples being at the beginning of Epyx's 1984 classic *Impossible Mission* when Elvin Atombender booms, "Another visitor. Stay a while. Stay forever." It added a whole new dimension to 8-bit gaming and kept the punters coming back for more.

CHIPS AHOY!

■ But the C64 was not just about a sound chip: to underline the C64's gaming prowess, there was an enhanced VIC-II graphics chip and two joystick sockets. It was a shame that loading was slow via cassette because with access to all this technology, the wait became frustrating. Worse still, even though it was possible to add a disc drive, most games came on tape. But the biggest problem was the price which at £350 at launch – almost twice the price of the VIC-20 – was far greater than the lower-priced but inferior Spectrum 48K.

The C64 nevertheless addressed many of the VIC-20s problems while still retaining its strengths; the most notable being the keyboard. Layout, size and appearance remained the same – aside from the C64's off-white colouring – and the keys were well-spaced and robust. By using the same plastic chassis as the VIC-20, Commodore was able to cut costs – now all it needed was a new logo.

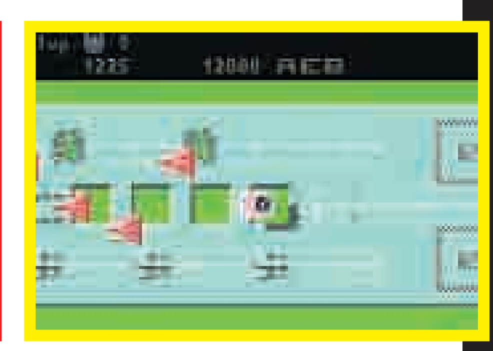


▲ Behold, the Commodore 64 SX – hardly the most ergonomically-designed machine ever, but one that commanded a lot of respect from fans.

◀ Look! He's using his computer by the pool! Clearly, he's the kind of person you want to be… even if his face is the colour of a beetroot.







The machine took off in 1984 when manufacturing costs dropped and the price of the C64 fell to £200. It was in this year that the home computer wars really heated up, with the launch of the Amstrad CPC464 putting extra pressure on the market. Games improved as programmers mastered the machine. The C64 is regarded as one of the easiest computers (ever) to program and saw the emergence of bedroom programmers. On turning it on, the machine loaded up the operating system and booted to a screen which was ready and waiting for you to input your commands; many people took advantage of this, learning to program immediately.

They were also encouraged by a new breed of lively, accessible and engaging computer magazines which reviewed the latest releases. Previously, computer mags had been stuffy, serious publications, filled with type-ins. Producing games was desirable now, and those who didn't get publishing deals gave their efforts away as freeware or shareware, many of which were reviewed in C64 magazines so still allowed the programmers to get their names published.

Crash was the Spectrum fan's magazine of choice, but for lovers of the C64 only *Zzap!64* would do. It flew off the shelves following its launch on 11 April 1985, some three years after the C64 emerged. By this time, the machine was established and, although it was being beaten by the Spectrum, it was ahead of the CPC. If sales were a measurement of how good a machine was, then in America the C64 won hands down, selling far better than any other machine beating the previous big-seller Apple II fair and square.

But not everybody loved the C64. Some said its success led to the infamous videogaming crash of 1983, which appeared to affect only America. Reasons for the crash were numerous: the falling quality of console games, the fact that US developers chased film licences and created naff game conversions of them (Atari's *ET* springs to mind), and the expense of the cartridge-based games. The C64 did play a part, Commodore took consoles head-on in its advertising and as the computer and its games were cheap, its popularity grew to the detriment of the console market.

Yet two years later in Britain (in that first issue of *Zzap!64*), it was clear that the industry still loved the C64 but its continued success seemed doubtful. Ian Stewart, the director of Gremlin Graphics, told the magazine, "In terms of its hardware the 64 is clearly superior to the Spectrum, but I think Atari machines have the edge on Commodore." Fortunately he was wrong, since the C64 went on to have a great Christmas and continued to sell well for another eight years.

PACKING IT IN

Like the Amiga, the C64 began to be sold with games in special bundles such as the *Terminator II* or *Quiz* packs. Some games, including *Terminator II,* came on cartridge and by combining a well-known computer with attractive, identifiable titles, sales were bolstered in the same way as the *Batman* pack for the Amiga became a big Christmas seller. But despite continuing sales, Commodore refused to stay still – it produced the SX-64 (basically a portable C64 with a 5-inch colour screen and one or two 5.25-inch floppy drive) although the price for this 10.5kg beast was a whopping $1,600. The firm also attempted to replace the C64 with the Commodore Plus/4, but it was incompatible with the 64's software, and flopped.

At the same time, there were many add-ons available for the C64 from joysticks to mice, as well as printers and disc drives. Commodore felt the C64 needed to work better with disc drives and so it launched a new machine, the C128 in January 1985 at Las Vegas' Consumer Entertainment Show, it was a better machine all round with 128K RAM, an 80 column mode, an improved processor – the 8502 running at 2MHz – and faster disc operations. It could also run all of the C64's software, although this turned out to be a downside as few games released could take advantage of the C128's capacity. Game producers churned out C64 titles, knowing that they would sell not just to C64 owners but to C128 owners too; as such, the C128 sold 4 million units until it was scrapped in 1989.

The C64 soldiered on, rewarded in 1986 with a facelift when the C64C – a machine that functioned the same but looked more modern – was released. Then, in 1990, an attempt to take on a resurgent console market saw Commodore create the C64 Game System. But this keyboardless, cartridge game-driven C64 failed to take off. Likewise, Amstrad's ill-fated GX4000 flopped. Both machines were hampered by lazy developers who simply ported old tape and disc-based games to cartridge and sold them at a higher price.

Ultimately, in 1993 the C64 could go no further, the Amiga cornered the market, it's superior 16-bit technology catching the imagination of gamers and PCs were becoming more commonplace in the home. 12 years on, though, and the C64 seems to be enjoying something of a renaissance – it's still on sale in high street shops, albeit it as a Competition Pro-style plug-and-play joystick containing 30 games. The fact that people are still playing C64 today as a result of these new products just proves one thing… a good machine never truly dies.

"THE C64 ENHANCED GAMES CONSIDERABLY WITH ITS CAPACITY FOR THREE VOICES, NINE OCTAVES AND FOUR WAVEFORMS"

THE BLUFFER'S GUIDE

When in early 1981 MOS Technology worked on designs for a graphic and audio chip, they were initially earmarked for a new videogame console to rival Atari's, but Commodore president Jack Tramiel said he wanted the chips to form part of his new 64K computer and the console idea was scrapped.

The development name for the C64 was the VIC-30 but Commodore wanted the number 64 to figure in the title of its new machine.

Unlike when a computer or console is launched today, there was no proper plan for the C64. Engineers were not initially making a computer – only some chips – and so were initially left to their own devices and given the freedom to create what they wanted without interruption from product development teams.



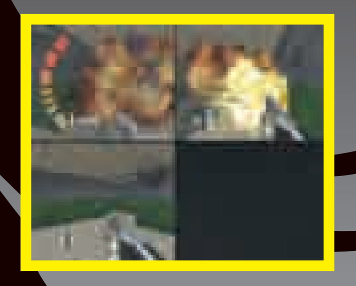






GOLDENEYE

And you thought all James Bond games were rubbish…





Release: 1996
Format: N64
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare

IT'S-A ME, JAMES BOND

GoldenEye was inspired by *Doom and Virtua Cop*, but a title with an Italian plumber also played a part. "We took the idea of five missions per level from *Mario 64*," revealed Martin Hollis, *GoldenEye*'s lead developer, at the 2004 European Developer's Forum. "We changed it from the *Mario* format which was attempt one mission per play, but the idea for the huge variety of missions within a level came from *Mario 64*." Mamma mia…

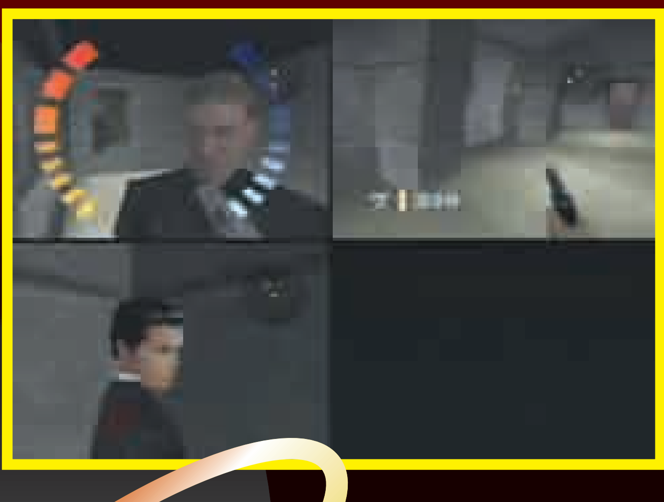
Play *GoldenEye* today and it's hard to believe it's the same game you once lost countless hours of your life to. The frame rate coughs and splutters along like a clapped-out banger, your screen appears to have been smeared with a pint of Vaseline, and the controls seem positively archaic. Still, with all these frustrating flaws, *GoldenEye*'s core gameplay still shines through with all the power of a 1,000-watt light bulb.

GoldenEye was Rare's third title for the N64, but after seeing the fantastic-looking visuals and startling gameplay it was obvious why Nintendo was so keen to grant the Twycross-based developer second-party status. The title screamed quality, and while there had been impressive film conversions over the years, few could compete with Rare's FPS – even if it did arrive two years after the film. The detailed locations were nigh-on identical to their celluloid counterparts, while impressive cut-scenes gave the impression that you really were Bond. The Facility level matched Bond's big screen antics, with you crawling along vents, and moving stealthily down stairs. It may not sound exciting, but it captured the tension of the film, and this attention to detail continued throughout *GoldenEye*'s 18 levels.

Though ropey by today's standards, the graphics engine made levels very authentic. Rare had created a game with extremely lifelike characters and filled it with fancy effects; it did suffer from a fair amount of fog, but this was a trait common in many N64 games. Add a great soundtrack – no one will forget that opening – and cracking spot effects, and the end result was a beautifully orchestrated wall of sound to match the game's eye-candy.

Cutting edge visuals aside, it was *GoldenEye*'s dynamic gameplay that made it stand out against every copycat FPS at the time. While other console shooters had been generic, 'run down the corridor' blasters, this was meticulously structured, with a variety of missions across three difficulty levels; Agent, Secret Agent, and '00' Agent. While missions were relatively simple and required you to do little more than make it to the end of a stage, '00' would test your abilities to the limit. Destroying mainframes, cracking passwords and disabling security cameras were a few of the tougher objectives and many proved very difficult. Luckily, Rare's level design, and the fact that completing tougher tasks unlocked great cheats meant that *GoldenEye*'s staying power was unrivalled.

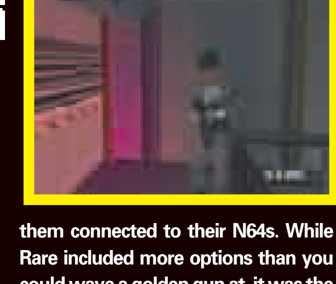
Another noticeable aspect of Rare's shooter was its superb auto-aiming featuring. It's appeared in countless





▲ The original *GoldenEye* team in all their glory – Nintendo certainly owes a lot to these guys…



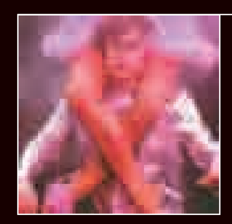


other shooters, but rarely has it been used so effectively. Amazingly, Rare had originally envisioned *GoldenEye* as an on-rails shooter. While a seemingly ridiculous notion when playing through the wonderful free-roaming levels, it actually makes a lot of sense when you start using the manual aim mode, as the game plays much like *Virtua Cop*. It becomes easier to target specific parts of enemies' bodies, which convincingly recoil when you hit them. While their deaths may have been more OTT than dramatic, it only added to *GoldenEye's* charm. For all its levels, additional missions, and startling playability *GoldenEye* would only last for so long. Good job Rare also included one of the greatest multiplayer experiences console gaming has ever seen.

The single-player game may have wowed gamers, but it was this incredible multiplayer mode that kept them connected to their N64s. While Rare included more options than you could wave a golden gun at, it was the superb level design that proved to be *GoldenEye's* trump card. Stages such as Stack, Facility and Temple provided players with a variety of gameplay tactics, and all could be pulled off with varying degrees of success. Whether you preferred sniping from a distance – and oh, how we loved the sniper rifle – or simply rushing in two Klobbs blazing, *GoldenEye* always delivered. Such was the success of the game's arenas, several of them turned up in *Perfect Dark*, while keen modders converted the stages onto a number of popular first-person shooters.

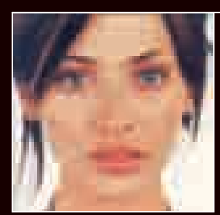
GoldenEye was quite simply ahead of its time, and the perfect template for which all console-based shooters and film tie-ins should spring from. What a shame then that so many developers seem to ignore it…

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1997



AT THE MOVIES

Never underestimate the power of Mike Myers. Not content with having people 'schwinging' and 'hurling' in *Wayne's World*, he pulled a similar stunt with *Austin Powers: International Man Of Mystery*. Please note: we will not say 'Groovy' for anyone. *Anyone.*



ON THE RADIO

Never mind the fact that Natalie Imbruglia was yet another *Neighbours* star who decided to start singing, or that her single, *Torn*, was actually a cover – she looked damned hot. And after all, isn't that what being a pop princess is all about?



ON YOUR BODY

If you were the sort of person that craved a tattoo but feared the wrath of your parents, then Henna tattoos were the perfect alternative. Not only did they look extremely funky, they also washed away after a short time… although brown really isn't our colour.



ON THE BOX

Teletubbies arrived with an absurd language that only students and the under-fives understood. Students discussed whether The Teletubbies secretly promoted alcohol and if Tinkey Winkey was gay, while toddlers learnt 'Eh Oh' before they could say'mummy.



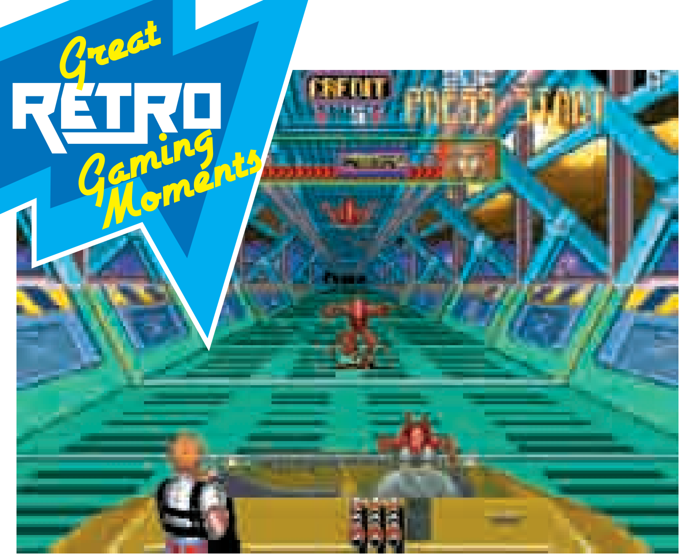
WHO EVER SAID CATCHING NEWTS WAS FUN?

A•L•I•E•N•S

Release: 1990
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House

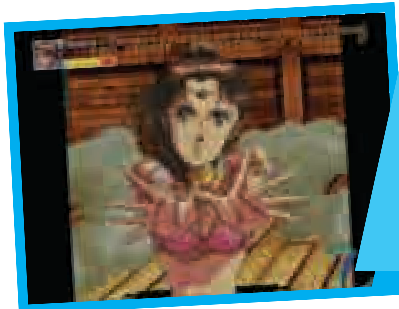
Never mind the fact it shared little in common with the actual movie (flying aliens, anyone?) – Konami's classic shooter remains a firm favourite in the games™ office. While *Aliens* delivered some strong level design and a bewildering array of ferocious xenomorphs (that stretched artistic licence to the limit), few stages of the game were able to match the exhilarating APC chase that saw you hurtling into the screen in search of the missing girl, Newt.

After disposing of level one's huge long-necked boss, Ripley (and Hicks if you were playing with a friend) set off in a conveniently parked personnel carrier and continued her rather dangerous quest for Newt. After the traditional 2D romp of stage one, rushing into the screen came as a nasty (yet exciting) shock and your mouth dropped open as you fought with the hectic controls. Aliens would approach at a tremendous pace and great skill was required in order to take down every last one. A bar at the top of the screen gave you a clear indication of how far away from your prize you were, while your ever-diminishing health ensured you played to the best of your ability.



As more aliens succumbed to your frenetic firepower, you eventually reached your goal and the huge APC came to a thunderous halt. Your elation was only short-lived, though, as a large winged beast appeared, from out of nowhere, and carried the troublesome tyke away. Well, what did you expect? It was only the second level after all…





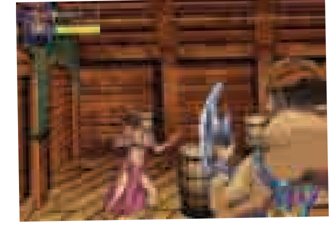
GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

NOW AND THEN, WE CELEBRATE NEGLECTED CLASSICS. THIS MONTH WE LOOK BACK AT ALIENS AND ARABIAN FIGHT

ARABIAN FIGHT

YOU'LL NEED MORE THAN MAGIC TO FIX THIS…

Release: 1992
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-House

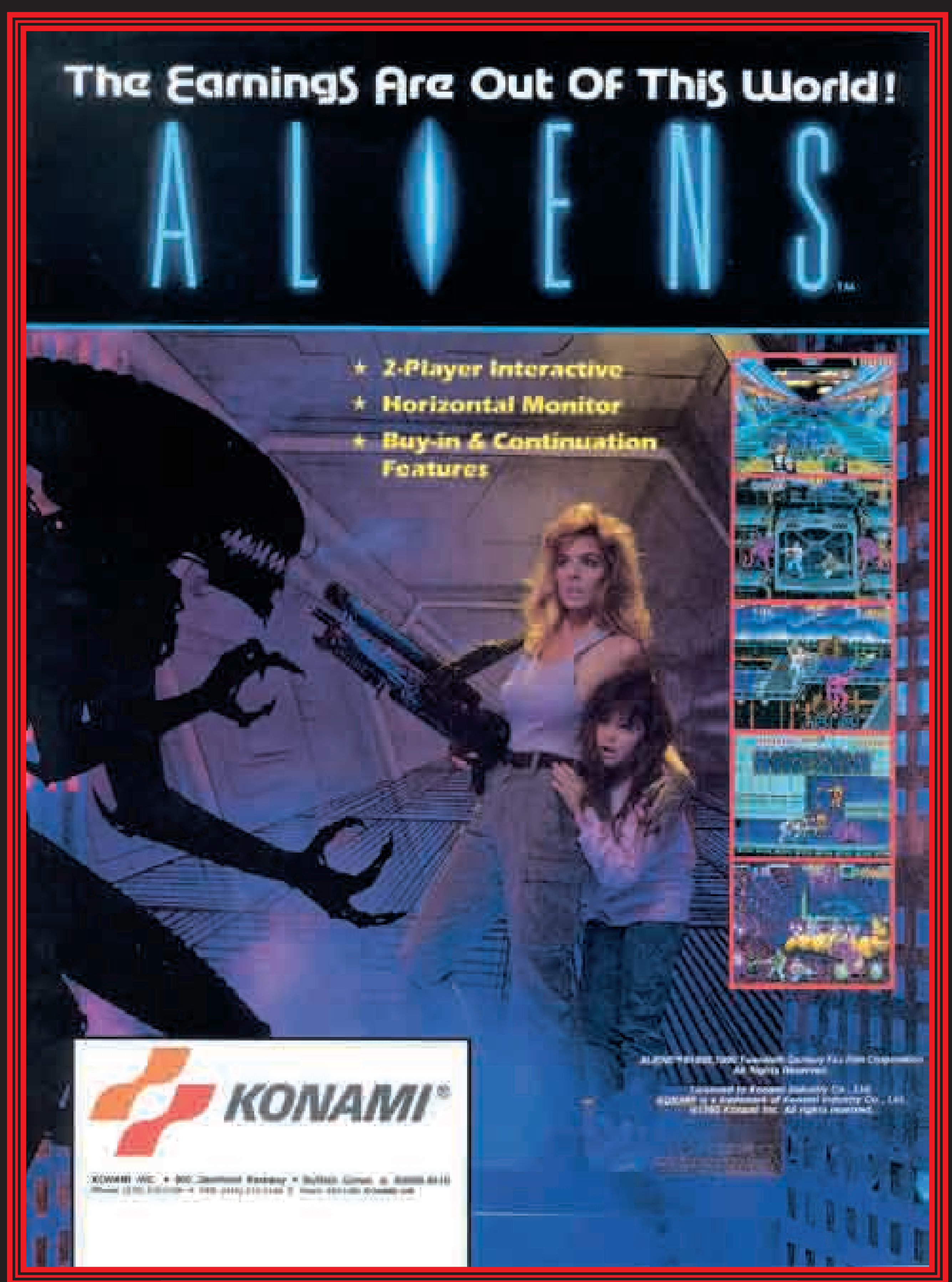


▲ Yes, it all looks very pretty – shame the gameplay wasn't quite up to the same standard…



At the end of the Nineties, Sega planned to release a new scrolling fighter but it knew it had to come up with something to make it stand out from the plethora of scrolling beat-'em-ups already out there. Granted, it contained that winning combination of pirates and demons, but swashbuckling alone wouldn't cut it. Luckily someone came up with the idea of using ridiculous amounts of scaling; and while the finished game wasn't exactly a masterpiece, it certainly drew gasps of wonderment from whoever played it.

Housed in a huge four-player cabinet, *Arabian Fight* was certainly a memorable experience. Okay, so the gameplay was dull (despite being able to team up with three other players) and we've seen more frames of animation in a flick book, but by golly it looked nice. Thanks to some impressive scaling techniques it actually looked as if pirates were leaping into the screen in order to engage in the on-screen melee. Everything scaled perfectly so that if you were standing in the foreground, throwing an enemy would result in him shrinking in size as he fell toward the back of the screen. Grab yourself a magic lamp, though, and you could unleash a devastating magic attack that saw your character leaping into the foreground and filling the screen with all their fury. Sadly – amazing visuals – you'd seen everything that *Arabian Fight* had to offer by the end of the second stage – little wonder hardly anyone remembers it now…



ALIENS (Arcade) Konami, 1986 – Original US Arcade Flyer



Rising Sun Retro

SIN AND PUNISHMENT: SUCCESSOR TO THE EARTH

For many, the advent of 16-bit consoles opened up a world of import gaming. One incentive was the ability to get hold of games that would never appear outside Japan. With this in mind, we'll be taking a look at the import classics that were never released in the UK. This month is another classic from Treasure, the superb Sin And Punishment…

Release: 2000
Format: N64
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Treasure

Considering it creates some of the most technically impressive games for whichever platform it chooses to work on, it's surprising that Treasure has never actually had a runaway hit. Take *Sin And Punishment* for example: here was a title with superlative visuals, wonderful gameplay mechanics and more vibrant explosions than an eruption in a paint factory. Yet for some bizarre reason this superb on-rails blaster absolutely bombed in Japan and the planned US release was quickly shelved (a doubly frustrating blow as it already came complete with a superb English language option).

Set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, *Sin And Punishment* was a graphical tour de force that left your gob well and truly smacked. Indeed, a recent airing in the games room had many staring wide-eyed in disbelief, as they struggled to comprehend how anything that spectacular could run on a humble N64. As it had done with countless other systems, Treasure used every trick in the book – and no doubt a few that weren't – to create a dazzling masterpiece that made Nintendo's 64-bit console sing with joy. A fact that's even more remarkable when you discover that this was the first fully 3D title that Treasure had worked on. Six years on and *Sin And Punishment* remains just as impressive as the first day we played it.

It may have suffered from rather poor textures and a low polygon count, but there was no denying the polish that Treasure added to its 3D masterpiece. The screen was constantly filled with hordes of enemies, while many of the bosses were gigantic, mechanical monstrosities blessed with wonderfully complex attack patterns and a devastating array of firepower, and all of this without a hint of slowdown. Set pieces appeared throughout *Sin And Punishment's* hour-long running timing and each encounter stayed with you forever. But perhaps the most outstanding moment of *Sin And Punishment* was when you took to the skies and participated in a spectacular aerial battle. Astride a flying craft, you swooped around the on-screen carnage while the N64's graphical abilities were pushed to the limit. Battleships spun





▲ Never mind the relatively low polygon count on the characters – it's the frantic action that really mattered.



crazily below you, jets roared overhead and lasers appeared to be firing at you from all directions. It's easily one of the N64's most exhilarating gaming moments and something we'd love to see replicated on the next generation of hardware. Add to this an electrifying score, decent voice acting – that puts most RPGs to shame – and a selection of boisterous spot effects, and it's little wonder that Treasure's shooter is still held in such high regard by anyone fortunate enough to have play it.

Of course, there has always been more to Treasure then jaw-dropping aesthetics, and *Sin And Punishment*'s superb control mechanics were no exception. Easily adaptable for both left and right-handed players, the interface set-up was elegant to use, yet remarkably effective. The N64's analogue stick controlled your on-screen cursor, while character movement was mapped to the C-buttons and d-pad. Add the ability to jump or roll out of harm's way with a swift double-tap to the left or right and the end result was fantastic mobility with minimum effort. And when you considered the sheer amount of firepower that Treasure threw at you, you needed all the help you could get.

Luckily your character was equipped with a handy gun that also doubled as an incredibly lethal sword (which, in turn, could be swung rapidly to act as a temporary shield). If anything got past your intense firepower, a few swings of your melee weapon would normally be enough to defeat whatever was after you. The sword wasn't used as a simple gimmick either, as later bosses required you to use your sword alone (or a quick combination of both weapons would eventually defeat them). One notable moment in the game saw you climbing to the top of a massive building and slashing at the bull-like boss who resided there. Time your strokes correctly and it was possible to topple him from his lofty perch. Another occasion saw you using your blade to deflect the many dead bodies that a female psychic hurled at you. Best of all, though, is a proper sword fight – all clashing blades and grim expressions – that eventually resulted in your opponent getting hurled through a huge window. Whether you used sword or gun, though, your enemy's resources seemed limitless and constantly bombarded you with one amazing boss after the other.

▼ Melodrama… in a videogame? Hey, don't knock it – Treasure really knew how to build up the tension…

Indeed, by the end of the first level even a fairly skilled player would have amassed close to 200 kills and the death count just kept rising. Every 100 kills earned you a stack of bonus points and an extra continue, while defeating certain enemies – normally the game's many bosses – rewarded you with yellow gems which again could be amassed for huge bonuses. It may have lacked the complexity of scoring systems that were seen in such titles as in *Radiant Silvergun* or *Ikaruga*, but the end result was no less enjoyable. Cynics may well scoff and describe *Sin And Punishment* as little more than a shallow, on-rails shooter, but those that do are missing the point entirely. *Sin And Punishment* is just as much an experience as it is a game and is a title that no self-respecting gamer should be without. It demands your utmost reflexes, tests your skills to their limit, and will leave you gasping in utter amazement. It can change hands for as much as £60 nowadays but in our opinions it worth every penny. What a shame it is that most PAL gamers won't have even heard of it…

TWO'S COMPANY?

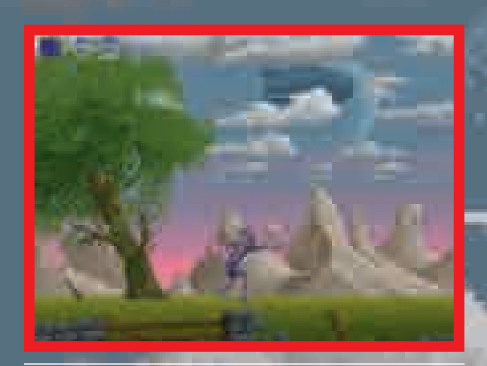
Treasure doesn't get it right all the time…

While *Sin And Punishment* comes equipped with a two-player option, it was a bit of a wasted opportunity and something that we rarely bothered with. Rather than have two characters race co-operatively throughout each glorious-looking stage, Treasure instead opted for one character to be controlled by both players. One person took care of all the hectic shooting – easily the most enjoyable aspect of the partnership – while the other was forced to avoid the carnage. It was certainly a novel idea, but it didn't really work, as it required a ridiculous amount of co-operation for what was an already intense game.

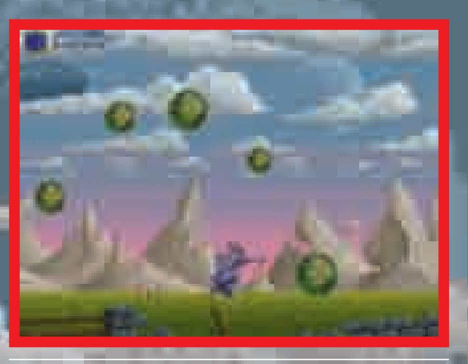
SHADOW OF THE BEAST

WHEN SHADOW OF THE BEAST ARRIVED IN 1989, IT ASTOUNDED AMIGA OWNERS – HERE WAS A GAME THAT SHOWED OFF THE CAPABILITIES OF COMMODORE'S MORE POWERFUL COMPUTER. WE SPOKE TO BEAST CO-CREATOR, PAUL HOWARTH, TO FIND OUT HOW HE AND MARTIN EDMONDSON PULLED OFF WHAT MANY THOUGHT WAS IMPOSSIBLE…

Behind the Scenes



▲ The combination of parallax scrolling (13 layers, the most ever for a game at the time) and lush visuals gave the game its much deserved reputation.



▲ Of course, there is an argument that more time should have been put into balancing the game's difficulty… it's bloody hard and no mistake.



▲ Punch, Mr Beast – punch with all your might. Those who left defeating this boss for too long wound up splattered against the wall behind you…

Release: 1989
Format: Amiga
Publisher: Psygnosis
Developer: Reflections

If you were an Amiga owner in the late Eighties, the one thing you feared above all else was quick and easy Atari ST ports. Now, we're certainly not suggesting that Atari's machine had no good games, but considering the Amiga 500 was much more powerful, it was frustrating to see that the machine's potential wasn't really being reached. All that changed, though, with the arrival of Reflections' *Shadow Of The Beast*. Featuring gorgeous sprites, 13 layers of incredible parallax scrolling, and an absolutely stunning score, not surprisingly it was met with dropped jaws throughout the Amiga 500 community.

Shadow Of The Beast may have wowed gamers with its incredible aesthetics, but not everyone was in awe of its actual gameplay, or the game's ridiculous difficulty level. But then, *Shadow Of The Beast* was never really a game to begin with; that came much later… "*Shadow Of The Beast* came about as a result of the technical challenge that the Amiga represented," explains Howarth. "I had previously written *Ballistix*, which was little more than a port of the Atari ST version. While working on this project I was getting to grips with the Amiga and becoming more aware of its totally untapped power. What you have to understand is at that point in time, no one had properly used the Amiga's hardware, and so I set out to see just how far I could push the machine. After only a couple of weeks we had the fabled 13 layers of parallax scrolling up and running, and were pushing the Amiga to the max… or so I thought at the time."

With the demo in action Howarth and Edmondson decided to show off their new creation; little did they realise just what it would mean, though. "Martin and myself were visiting Psygnosis in order to finish off *Ballistix*," Howarth recalls. "We thought we'd show off our technical demo to Psygnosis – they were absolutely blown away by it and wanted to sign it up immediately. I was rather worried, though, that it was only a scrolling demo, and I wasn't even sure if I could actually add a main character to it, let alone any baddies for you to fight. The managing director reassured me though, 'Don't worry, you'll work it out,' and that was how *Shadow Of The Beast* was born."

Beast's conception may have begun, but Howarth and Edmondson still had to figure out what type of game it would become, and more importantly, how they were going to cram a game into their demo that was already pushed to the max. It wasn't easy, but *Shadow Of The Beast* was eventually completed in around nine months – not bad considering much of the technology used was cutting edge at the time. "There were three main special effects in use that hadn't been seen before," continues Howarth. "Dual playfields: the background is effectively a different screen to the foreground. Multiplexed sprites: the Amiga has eight 16 x 16 pixel hardware sprites but you can 'cheat' and reuse them if you're clever, I used them to produce a whole mountain range. Parallax scrolling: the Amiga lets you hardware scroll the whole screen 'for free', but using the Copper, it's possible to scroll individual portions at different speeds, hence the parallax scrolling (which actually takes very little power to produce). Indeed, I had three very special friends that helped me out with the parallax, Paula, (Fat) Agnus and Denise; they were the names of the custom chips that made the Amiga so powerful."

MAKING MONSTERS

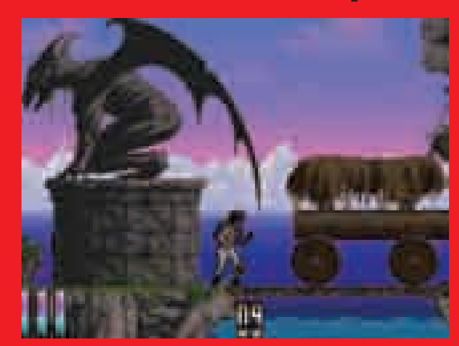
Even after these initial problems had been solved, the pair still had their work cut out, as the game still needed a protagonist and enemies to face. "Adding the monsters was one of the toughest parts," admits Howarth. "Once we had a scrolling demo I wasn't sure how to get anything more from the machine. However, with a little clever thinking and planning it became possible to address this issue." After viewing the end product, it's obvious to see that Howarth's original fears had been easily dispelled, most noticeably when you met *Beast's* impressive bosses. Some of them were absolutely huge, and provided many of the game's ▶

"I HAD THREE FRIENDS TO HELP ME MAKE THE AMIGA SO POWERFUL, PAULA, (FAT) AGNUS AND DENISE – THE NAMES OF THE THE CUSTOM CHIPS"

RETURN OF THE BEAST?

Howarth discusses a revitalisation of everyone's favourite beast…

The *Shadow Of The Beast* franchise may have officially ended 14 years ago, but Howarth is still optimistic that a fourth title could eventually appear at some stage in the future; although its likely to look nothing like the original *Beast* games. "Loads of people have suggested that I should get around to making a 'Beast 4'," he admits. "I've given it some thought, and would quite like to see it done as a first or third-person graphical adventure – a bit like *Tomb Raider* but with enhanced huge monsters and devious traps to negotiate."





▲ The original Beast game was beautiful, but things only got better for the sequels… and who could forget those hauntingly lyrical theme tunes?



▲ Originally, the game was just called Beast but Psygnosis renamed it to prevent gamers confusing it with other similarly-named titles.

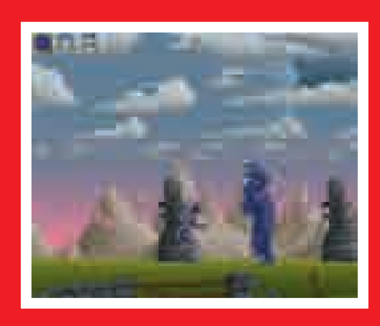
"BEAST MAY HAVE BEEN TECHNICALLY AMAZING FOR ITS TIME, BUT SUCH VISUALS COME AT A PRICE: LOADING TIMES TAKE FOREVER"

ON REFLECTION

Learning the hard way…

While Howarth is the first to admit that *Beast* may have been slightly lacking in the gameplay stakes, he'll also point out that the majority of its mistakes were eventually rectified in the game's two sequels. *Shadow Of The Beast 2* was completed in around a year, while the third title eventually ran over by a year and ended up taking twice as long to finish. Things got so hectic that Howarth finally had to enlist the help of Cormac Batsone, Awesome's programmer, so he could actually complete it.

The sequels also delved more into the trilogy's mythos, helping to explain how the main character Aarbron eventually regains his human form. Mostly though, people prefered the later games because they were so much easier to play, and had a greater emphasis on puzzle solving. We'd still recommend playing through the original *Beast* first, though, as an insight to how far the trilogy progressed…



greatest moments – even if they did give Howarth major headaches. "The bigger they came, the more processing power and memory they consumed," he recalls. "In reality they could have been even bigger if it wasn't for the American machines – as they can only move around 20 per cent less in a game frame than the European machines can. A pity really, but sadly, you do have to cater for both sides of the Atlantic."

While *Beast* is well known for its technical prowess, its startling visuals and haunting music are what most gamers remember. Both Edmondson and Howarth were big fans of fantasy art, and owned many books by the likes of Roger Dean and Rodney Mathews; it was these artists that provided the inspiration for the beast and his many enemies, which in turn, gave *Beast* its distinct look. If the visuals were gorgeous, then its uplifting musical score was positively stunning; the sort of haunting composition that stayed with you long after the game had ended. Howarth and Edmondson were great fans of Dave Whittaker and were keen to get him on board. "Fortunately, Dave was sourced through Psygnosis for us," recalls Howarth. "He'd done some work on other projects for them, and his stuff sounded absolutely fantastic for the time. From the minute we heard his music, there was no choice for us and we knew we had to have him."

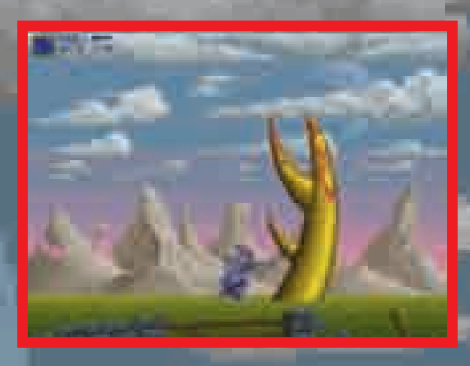
This title may have been technically astounding for its time, but the superlative visuals came at a price: loading times seemed to take forever. "I used to think they were really bad," admits Howarth. "But looking at some recent games that can take two DVDs around 20 minutes to install, the load times for the Amiga don't seem that harsh nowadays. We actually spent a lot of time optimising the load times on the Amiga – they could have been much worse. We even twisted the data around physically on the disc so each track was aligned in just the right place, allowing for the time it takes for the drive head to step from one track to the other."

Loading times aside, *Beast* was a revelation when it appeared, and instantly caused a huge commotion in the gaming press. Indeed, Howarth remembers walking past a local games shop and seeing a poster which simply declared '*Shadow Of The Beast* – the reason to buy an Amiga'. Of course, considering the amount of extras that Psygnosis had decided to include, it was little wonder that Reflections' new game was so desirable. As with many Psygnosis titles, *Shadow* came complete with some incredible box art by Roger Dean. Not only that, the limited edition boxes came with gorgeous t-shirts, which have now become extremely desirable, and subsequently, very hard to get hold off. Although Howarth and Edmondson had no say in *Beast's* packaging, they weren't too worried about the lack of input. "We saw the prototypes and, of course, had no issues at all," confirms Howarth. "Psygnosis was using the biggest boxes it had ever used so of course we loved them."

PUBLIC OPINION

With *Shadow Of The Beast* finally in the shops, gamers were soon getting to grips with the stunning looking title with decidedly mixed results. Many found the gameplay too limiting and basic, and felt that it hadn't really progressed on from the many 8-bit titles that had come before it. Others felt that the game was just too damned hard for its own good, and that there weren't enough combat moves in it. While the beast had a fairly limited number of moves he did gain access to a jetpack and gun on the later stages – not that these additions made the game any easier. "*Beast* was







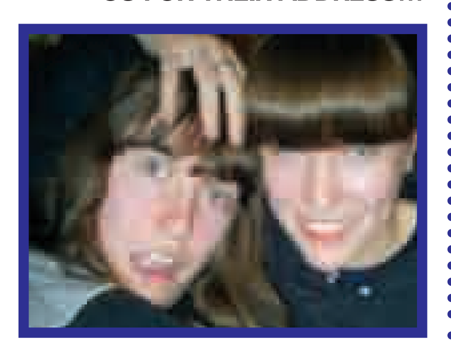
tough, no doubt about it," confirms Howarth. "In those days there was very little playtesting. Psygnosis didn't even have a test department. At the time we were looking to give people a challenge, and so we made sure that the game was just about possible to complete. I know I managed to complete it once or twice." Despite its extreme difficulty (there were plenty of cheats available to make it more manageable), Howarth was more than happy with the finished product and insists that it was as complete a game that the duo could make. "Back in those days, it was very much seat of the pants stuff," he admits. "We didn't really have a concept or plan but the game still did everything we wanted it to at the time."

If Howarth and Edmondson were happy with the eventual product, then Psygnosis was ecstatic, and it quickly commissioned *Beast* to appear on several other platforms ranging from the PC Engine to the humble Spectrum. Russell Kay and David Jones who had both worked on *Lemmings* handled the majority of ports, while later ones came under the jurisdiction of Real Time Worlds. As far as Howarth is concerned, though, the various ports were something of a mixed bag. "The FM Towns version was pretty good, and so was the PC Engine version," he reveals. "These two versions looked great compared to the original Amiga version. The FM Towns machine, for example, had 256 colours – loads compared to the Amiga's 32. Other ports (I won't name them) were simply not as good. I think sometimes games simply don't work on certain platforms." It's a fair point, and one that holds up well when you consider the Spectrum, Amstrad and Master System outings in particular. *Beast's* main strength was its visuals, so inevitably owners of inferior systems ended up with a game that had few redeeming features.

Despite the shoddiness of several ports, and its sheer difficulty level *Beast* is still remembered fondly by many gamers. Howarth feels this is due to its technical merits, rather than the actual gameplay. "*Beast* definitely broke the mould and set a new standard for games," he admits. "It proved that cheap Atari ST ports were no longer acceptable, and showed off the true power of the Amiga. I think it's this huge leap forward in technology that has kept it in people's minds." While Howarth was in such a candid mood, it seemed a good time to approach the subject of style over substance – did he think that *Shadow Of The Beast* qualified? "Totally," he laughs. "My apologies to those that wanted an in-depth gaming experience when they purchased *Beast*. At the time, I counted myself lucky for actually being able to get *any* gameplay into what had started life as little more than a graphical demo…"

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME COMING, BUT THIS MONTH'S ISSUE OF RETRO FINALLY HAS SOME FEMALE COLLECTORS FOR YOU ALL TO ENJOY. CHARLOTTE AND CATHERINE WOOLLEY HAVE BEEN PLAYING GAMES FOR THE LAST TEN YEARS AND THE 17-YEAR-OLD STUDENTS FROM ESSEX HAVE NOW BUILT UP AN IMPRESSIVE COLLECTION. JUST DON'T ASK US FOR THEIR ADDRESS…



Q: So Catherine, how did you both become interested in gaming?

Catherine: We were about seven when we were first allowed to play on our Spectrum, as our parents were concerned that we might break it. Later on, we became very impressed with the Mega Drive – we were always going around our friends to play on theirs – so our mum went out and picked us up a Sega Master System, our very first console. After the Master System, we moved onto the N64 and foolishly decided to sell all our current games. It was a decision that we quickly regretted and within the year we were immediately tracking down all our favourites again. That was roughly seven years ago and we've been collecting games ever since then, really.

Q: And what was it that actually led you to start collecting?

Charlotte: When we originally had our Master System, we didn't realise that there was another game with it – it was the version that had *Sonic The Hedgehog* built into it. The discovery was so exciting that we started to track down as many games as we could in the hope that similar surprises would lie in store for us.

Q: That's quite a large selection of PlayStation games that you have…

Charlotte: The great thing about PlayStation games is that they're easily available and can be mostly found at reasonable prices. Over the last few years, it's been pretty easy for us to get hold of pretty much every PlayStation game that we've ever wanted to play. We'd love to collect a similar amount of games for our other systems, but since many high street stores have stopped selling them they're a lot harder to track down.

Q: You appear to have a lot of unboxed games. We take it you're not to fussed about condition then…

Catherine: When we first started buying our consoles, many of them were no longer on sale in stores. As a result, we had to resort to other methods for collecting our games and most people never seemed to keep their titles in the greatest of condition. Luckily for us we tend to mostly buy games for playing, so condition is not really that important a factor for us. Granted, it's always nice to have a complete game and if we see a boxed title we want, we'll certainly pick it up, but we would never dream



▼ Wow… that's a whole lot of PSone games. We bet there's more than a few duffers here.





▼ It's not nearly a full collection, but that's more than enough Game & Watch handhelds to be getting on with…



▼ They've got a point, you know – why bother buying things if you're not going to end up playing with them?



of missing out on a great game just because it wasn't complete.

Q: Do you have any sealed games, and if not, why not?
Charlotte: No, as we like to be able to actually play the games that we own. We collect games to play, not so they'll just get dusty on a long-forgotten shelf. The closest we have to sealed games are ones that still have their cellophane covers – the actual seal was broken on them long ago though.

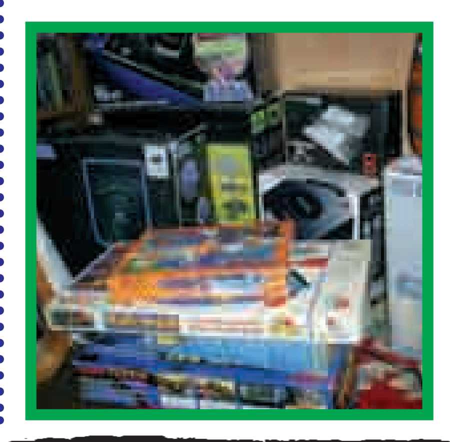
Q: What's the most treasured part of your collection and why?
Catherine: Charlotte's most treasured item would be her *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* as it's complete and in mint condition. For me, it's my Sega Multi-Mega and my *Shenmue* collection. I love the Multi-Mega because it's the smallest Mega Drive/Mega CD system that I've ever seen. My actual *Shenmue* collection, on the other hand, consists of *Shenmue* and *Shenmue 2,* a Shenmue Beta disc and a *Shenmue 2* book that Charlotte picked up for me. Granted, it's not staggeringly massive, and the games are extremely easy to get hold of, but in my opinion they are the best games ever made and I wouldn't be able to live without them.



Q: You have a lot of non-gaming retro items – what's the appeal?
Catherine: It just all adds to the collection, really. Granted, coats and t-shirts may be fairly superficial as far as collecting goes, but they look really nice and we wouldn't be without them.

Q: What's the most expensive item that you have ever bought for your collection?
Charlotte: We don't really tend to spend much on retro games and tend to buy most titles pretty cheaply. Our most extravagant purchase was a Japanese Dreamcast, which came with around 10 games, a light gun, steering wheel and fishing rod. However, even at £50 it turned out to be a real bargain.

Q: So is there anything you're still on the lookout for?
Charlotte: We're always looking out for anything that we don't already own but only for consoles, as we don't really care for the older computers anymore. One item that we're really interested in tracking down is *Earthworm Jim 2* for the Sega Saturn. It's purely for sentimental reasons, though, so if anyone has any ideas where we could find it, then let us know.



Q: It's not often that we have female collectors in the magazine… any more of you out there?
Catherine: I'm sure there are lots of female gamers; but I couldn't really say if they're actual collectors like us. From our own experiences most girls (not all though) are more than happy playing various *Dance Dance Revolution* titles.

Q: What does your family think of your hobby?
Charlotte: Our dad doesn't really care about it all, but our mum tries to help out by spotting games and asking if we have them. She's also more than happy to put money toward them as well, for which we are deeply grateful. The only real problem is space, we have a lot more stuff than you can see in our pictures and we're seriously running out of room for it all.





Share your views about old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peters Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

CHAOTIX CONFUSION

Dear games™,
In your *Sonic* Retro Buyers' Guide, you mentioned that "many believe *Knuckles' Chaotix* started off as a Mega Drive prototype." The ROM file for the original Mega Drive prototype can be found at a few sources online, and was/is known as *Sonic Crackers*. It features Sonic and Tails linked together by rings, rather than Knuckles and one of the *Chaotix* team, but the basic idea is exactly the same. Pull it together lads…
Renegade

See, you're taking us far too literally. We weren't implying that the original Mega Drive game was called *Knuckles' Chaotix*, just that many think both titles are one and the same. Considering how quickly we received your mail, you must have been chomping at the bit to prove how wrong we were…

CAN'T YOU BE MORE PC?

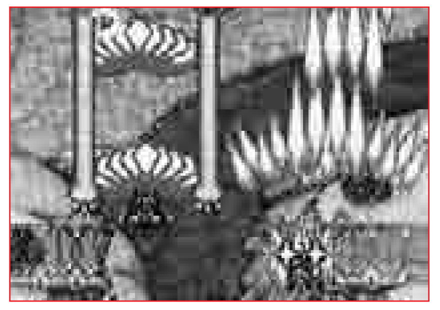
Dear games™,
Please can you have more coverage of PC games in the Retro section? Some of the games that I played as a kid in the late 80s and early 90s were absolutely superb, and they still tempt me to open the DOS prompt on my PC.
Now I know that many games, such as the *Lotus* series, were also available for the Amiga and various consoles, but many weren't. When I talk to people about retro PC games many only mention *Doom*, *Quake* and *Wolfenstein 3D*. But how about *Commander Keen*, *Jazz Jackrabbit*, *Cosmo's Cosmic Adventure*, *Zone 66*, and my favourite, *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat*? Any kind of feature you could put together about the retro PC scene would be greatly appreciated.
Jimbo McK, via email


Don't worry… we'll get around to games like *Jazz Jackrabbit* soon…

You're not the first person to talk to us about PC retro gaming, and we're sure you won't be the last. We've several features already lined up for future issues, but a look back at classic PC titles sounds very interesting. Watch this space…

SHMUP SCHMUCK

Dear games™,
Ladies and gentlemen, the world's greatest superhero has written in to **games™**. No, not me, the gentleman from issue 36 who claimed that shmups are "boring" and require "no skill to play"! If there are people out there who find the world of hardcore 2D shooters tediously easy we should all be very afraid. What other traditionally challenging things can these people do with contemptuous ease? Sniping? Assembling super tanks from bits and pieces found in a shed (to the tune of the *A-Team* theme, of course)? Bringing down big corporations using only chicken wire and a fake moustache? If these new breed apply themselves, get off their arses and bother to start a new world order, we're all in the shit.
Henry Chapman


Crap at games? Then don't bother with shmups – they'll be your downfall.

We couldn't agree more Henry. Shmups require nerves of steel, a good memory and the reflexes of a hyperactive cat. Anyone that thinks the genre is tedious and has nothing to offer obviously doesn't play them…

I NEED MORE SLEEP!

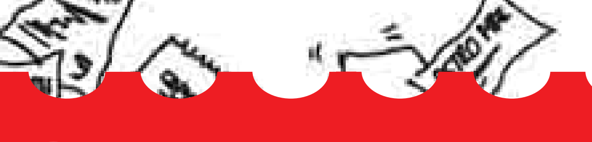
Dear games™,
I'm writing regarding an N64 game called *40 Winks* that was never released. However, it was fully finished and reviewed in an N64 magazine that your company once published.

Would you have any idea if this cartridge can still be found at your company, as I've heard through various contacts that the game would be put up for sale on eBay, although it's yet to have appeared…

I'm enquiring on behalf of a friend of mine who is in the process of collecting (and eventually releasing) N64 games that were







STAR LETTER

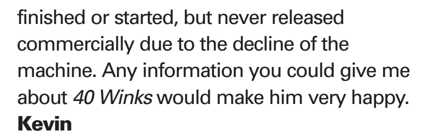
Dear games™,
Until recently, I was one of those hip young gamers that got hyped over the latest machines and releases, and considered retro games to be nothing more than old titles that were well past their prime.

However, a few months back I decided – in true gamer fashion – to lock myself in a darkened room and play one of my all-time favourite games, *Final Fantasy VII*. While some pessimistic gamers say it was the beginning of the end for the franchise, I loved every damned minute of it.

'I remember the day when this had the best graphics ever,' I thought to myself, and that's when it suddenly hit me. I was starting to sound like a retro gamer! I immediately realised that the graphics were rubbish and that this once amazing new game with the photo-realistic graphics now looked like some naff homebrew title. Christ, the game's eight years old – half my actual lifetime! Hands trembling, I began to pull out all the games on my clichéd favourite games list, and looked at their ages. *Shenmue*? Six years old. *Ocarina Of Time*? Seven!

It was only then that I began to realise that I too had turned retro. I found myself complaining about the lack of good games coming out, and forever searching game shops for that lost copy of *Vagrant Story*. I had become the very thing that I'd once feared. Now I can finally see where you're all coming from.
Sandy Nisbet

Glad to have you on board Sandy. Sure, it takes a little while to get used to your new outlook, but if you can balance it with a love for newer titles, then you can maintain a perfect gaming balance. In the meantime have some vouchers, you may be able to track down that elusive *Vagrant Story* with them…



finished or started, but never released commercially due to the decline of the machine. Any information you could give me about *40 Winks* would make him very happy.
Kevin

Sorry, Kevin, but after much searching, we've not been able to find the old office copy of *40 Winks* anywhere (or any other old N64 games for that matter). It's quite possible that its hidden away in a long-forgotten cupboard along with stacks of old magazines, or (more likely) simply been thrown out. Ironic really, as we're always harping on about the industry having no pride in its heritage…

I HAVE A DREAM…

Dear games™,
I was wondering if there was any chance that you could mention somewhere in the Retro section about the online petition at dreamcast-scene.com to get *Senko No Ronde* released for the Dreamcast. I would be forever grateful if you could help toward keeping the dream alive.
Ian

Your wish is our command, Ian.

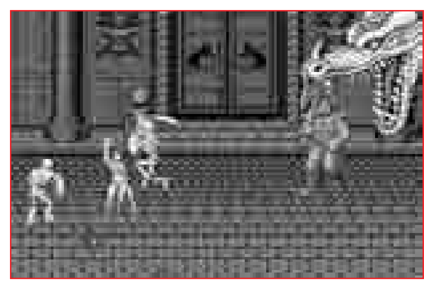
AXED-OFF

Dear games™,
Is it just me or do other retro fans find *Golden Axe* the most overrated title ever? Regardless of arcade-to-Mega Drive conversion issues, I remember it being really slow and annoying. It was so easy to miss the enemies above/below you, riding the low dragons was hit and miss, and the whole thing trundled along to a musical score that I found really depressing. Yet it's often mentioned and given classic status. *Streets Of Rage 2* is a far superior game. Support the *Streets Of Rage* PSP campaign!
Hilary O'Neil

Sorry Hilary, but it's just you. Granted it's not in the same league as *Streets Of Rage 2*, but if we had a penny for every ten pence we fed into arcade machines… well, y'know we had a well-spent youth playing it. Have you actually had a go on the arcade version? It's miles better.



If you've never played *Final Fantasy VII*… well, you're clearly mad.



Golden Axe – it's not rubbish, no matter what some people tell you…







CLASSIC CONSOLE BUYERS' GUIDE QUICK REFERENCE

BUYERS' GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-25
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£15-30



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£15
Atari Jaguar	£20-30

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35



MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£70-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£40-100
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£115-220
PC Engine GT	£80-180
Super Grafx	£200-300



NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£10-200 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-45
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20-30
Master System II	£10-25
Mega Drive	£5-20
Mega Drive II	£10-25
Game Gear	£10-25
Mega CD	£40-60
Sega 32X	£30
Sega Nomad	£75-150
Saturn	£15-35 (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£20-200 (depending on model)

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

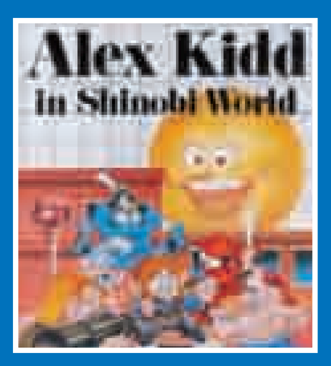
Neo-Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo-Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo-Geo CD	£125-175
Neo-Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo-Geo Pocket Color	£30-50

Right then – you've just picked up a second-hand console and are looking for some classics to play on it. The only problem is, you're not really too sure what to go for. Hopefully we can help… Every month we'll be printing the current prices for a range of classic games for a particular system. Of course, this is subject to change; so don't be surprised if you manage to get one for less or, if you're really unlucky, more. This month, we're taking a look at some of better Master System titles you can buy…

Alex Kidd In Shinobi World

Developer: Sega
Estimated Price: £2–5

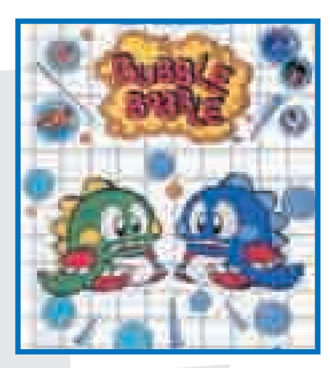
While many Alex Kidd adventures were hit and miss, *Alex Kidd In Shinobi World* got it right. A shameless parody of Sega's hit arcade game, *Shinobi World* saw the big-eared hero face off against cute (yet deadly) ninjas in order to rescue his girlfriend. Previous *Alex Kidd* titles weren't that impressive on the aesthetics front but this was a huge improvement with cartoony visuals and excellent remixed *Shinobi* tunes.



Bubble Bobble

Developer : Taito Corporation
Estimated Price: £4–8

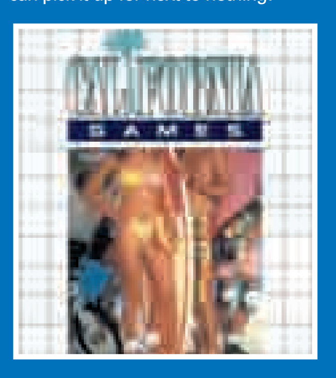
It may not have been arcade perfect but the Master System conversion was still worth its weight in gold. Sure, the catchy theme tune was too tinny and we could have done without occasional flickery sprites, but the gameplay was faultless which made up for *Bubble Bobble's* (few) aesthetic shortcomings. Sadly, it's hard to get hold of in mint condition nowadays, so your best bet is to head over to auction sites such as eBay or videogameauction.com.



California Games

Developer: Epyx
Estimated Price: £2–4

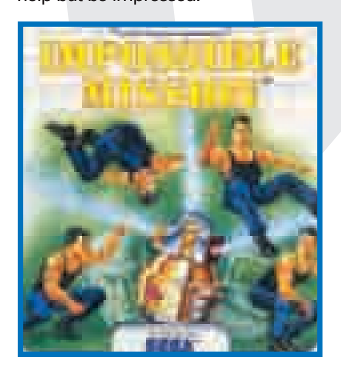
California Games is without doubt the most comprehensive sports titles available for Sega's 8-bit machine and a must-have for owners. BMX riding, frisbee throwing and surfing are just a few events you can take part in and you can play against seven other players. Impressively animated sprites and very competitive gameplay make it's easy to see why Epyx's superb game has remained popular. Plus you can pick it up for next to nothing!



Impossible Mission

Developer: Tiertix
Estimated Price: £2–5

It started out on 8-bit computers but was so popular that it soon arrived on the Master System. Despite its age, *Impossible Mission* still looks fantastic thanks to the silky smooth animation and detailed locations. Your main sprite was wonderfully athletic and would majestically leap about. It may be tough, but it's put together with such flair and panache that you can't help but be impressed.



Psycho Fox

Developer: Vic Tokai
Estimated Price: £3–5

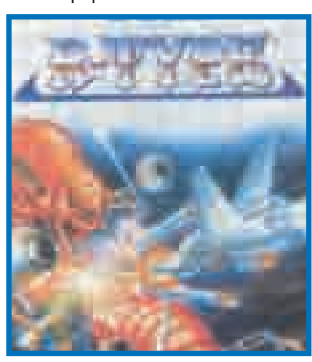
Psycho Fox may look like just another platformer but underneath is quite a complex game. Accessing the pause buttons gave you a selection of items to choose from, plus it was possible to turn into a selection of useful animals, in turn making certain stages of the game much easier to negotiate. Although not as common as most Master System titles, you should be able to find it without too much effort.



R-Type

Developer: Compile
Estimated Price: £2–5

The Master System was somewhat starved of decent shooters, so it's no surprise that *R-Type* is a standout game. While gaudier than the original arcade machine, with flickering sprites and slowdown, there was no denying this was a very strong port. The PC Engine may have had the most authentic look, but the addition of a new bonus level ensured that this became popular with collectors.



Sonic The Hedgehog 2

Developer: Sega
Estimated Price: Price: £1–3

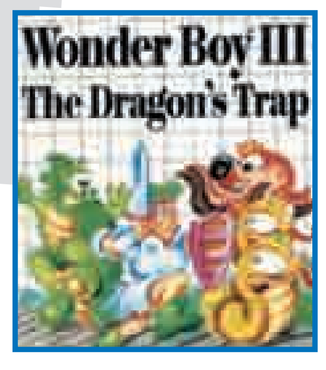
Sonic may have had an impressive Master System debut but it had nothing on Sega's superior sequel. Blindingly fast and featuring some vibrant visuals, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* was an instant and deserved hit. It would never be on par with its 16-bit brother, but the Master System outing was still a stunning conversion. You can now pick it up at a great price too.



Wonderboy III: The Dragon's Trap

Developer: Sega/West One
Estimated Price: £3–7

This is simply the greatest adventure game the Master System has ever seen. Hell, it could be its best game ever. It begins with you being turned into a fire-breathing (yet cute) dragon and as the story progresses you gain the ability to turn into other beasts. It's a sprawling jaunt that'll entertain for ages, and is easily worth three or four times its asking price. Utterly superb.





proudly sponsors...





Raising awareness and funds for Everyman,
part of the Institute of Cancer Research .

Please visit www.play4charity.co.uk for more info & news.

Exhibitors attending the show include...











RetroPassion.Co.Uk



RETROVIDEOGAMES

Dec 3rd (10:30am - midnight)
& Dec 4th (10:30am - 5pm) 2005

@ The Wardens Cricket Club, Glasshouse Park,
Glasshouse Lane, Kenilworth, Warwickshire, CV8 2AL

Saturday £7.50 - Sunday £5 - W/E £10

For further info visit www.play4charity.co.uk

Officially Endorsed By




eMag

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



BEAT DOWN: FISTS OF VENGEANCE

As much fun as being able to dress butch street brawlers in boob tubes and mini-skirts is, it's hard to see where the goodness of *Beat Down* lies. What's worse is that it's from Capcom, the king of the scrolling fighter. Oh dear…



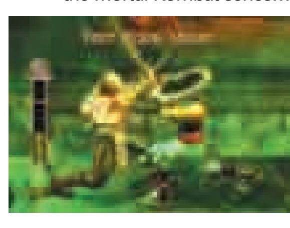
NHL 2006

We hate to say it, but… well, it's about time too. Why it's taken EA so long to work out that it had the perfect formula for ice hockey back in 1996, we don't know, but at least the 'back to basics' approach of *NHL 2006* means we can finally have some fun again.



MORTAL KOMBAT: SHAOLIN MONKS

Call it masochism, call it stupidity, but we can't help but quite enjoy *Shaolin Monks*. Yes, we can quite clearly see that it's not exactly amazing, but at the same time we can appreciate all the nuances of the *Mortal Kombat* series…





PLAYSTATION2

Manufacturer Sony
UK Launch Date
24 November 2000
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £104.99

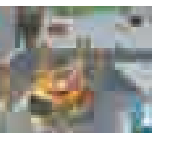
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PStwo is available in both traditional black and 'special' silver.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

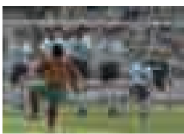
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout Revenge	EA Games	Criterion Studios	A refinement of everything that makes *Burnout* so great
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House	Hard as nails but certainly the highlight of the series
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
God Of War	Sony	In-House	Sony's answer to *Devil May Cry* is a godly delight
Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Polyphony Digital	Worth the wait, thankfully – even without the online mode
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Bigger, badder, better – a great *GTA* experience
Gregory Horror Show	Capcom	In-House	Bizarre, twisted and yet oh-so enjoyable
Gitaroo Man	THQ	Koei	The genuine thing of rhythm-action beauty
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Minna Daisuki Katamari Damacy IMPORT	Namco	In-House	Just as quirky as the original, which makes it brilliant
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	In-House	Flawed genius, but genius nevertheless
Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House	The original still reigns for style and substance
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House	The best football game around? Yes – again
Rez	Sega	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	A great refinement that enhances the series further
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft	Better? Again? How does Neversoft keep doing it?
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	By far the deepest 3D fighting game around today

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

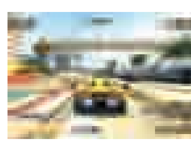
Minna Daisuki Katamari
■ The same as before, only better… if that even makes any sense. Rolling up all the things has never been so fun.



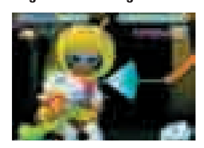
Winning Eleven 9
■ It's not that we're very predictable – it's just that when it comes to quality football, we can't resist. Sorry.



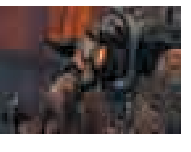
Burnout Revenge
■ Better, faster and generally more enjoyable than the last game, even if it does only tweak a few of the wheelnuts.



Gitaroo Man
■ Damn you, Mojo King B – why do you have to be so tough on Master mode? Our fingers are bleeding now…



God Of War
■ Swinging blades, severed heads, screaming women… it's either *God Of War* or a Saturday night out for us.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE



XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft
UK Launch Date
13 March 2002
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £99.99

Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. Despite the upcoming Xbox 360, Microsoft has pledged to support the console until at least 2007.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

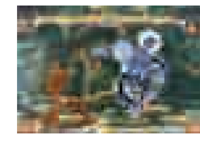
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Burnout Revenge	EA Games	Criterion Studios	Another high-speed smash of a success for Criterion
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios	A fine example of great gameplay and top-notch graphics
Def Jam: Fight For New York	Electronic Arts	Aki Corporation	Ultra-violent fighting has never looked so good
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box	A special breed of RPG – well worth experiencing
Fahrenheit	Atari	Quantic Dream	A hauntingly beautiful and intriguing adventure game
Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	In-House	No *GT4* comparisons – just a solid Xbox racing game
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	And about time too – a better version in almost every way
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Tecmo	Damn tough, but a great example of style and gameplay
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants	A complete change of pace for *Oddworld* that really works
Out Run 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	Stunning reproduction of a great arcade game
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House	The only football game worth owning, period
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House	An enjoyable and solid psychic blasting romp
Psychonauts	Majesco	Double Fine	Wonderfully unique and enjoyable, if a little short
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	An essential update to the hugely popular Live game
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	In-House	The best *Splinter Cell* yet, thanks to the co-op mode
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	In-House	The greatest collection of fighting games ever? Oh, hell yes
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Free Radical	An infinitely expanding universe of online blasting action

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

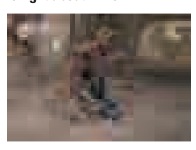
Psychonauts
As funny as it is filled with things to collect, *Psychonauts* is a unique experience; a platformer with a difference.



SF Anniversary Collection
Bap, bap, and indeed, BAP. There's a lot to be said for simple 2D fighting and this collection shouts it out loud.



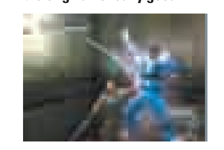
Ninja Gaiden
The *Black* edition's not far away, so the time to be sharpening those ninja skills is right about… now.



Fahrenheit
The worst thing about *Fahrenheit* is its fate – likely to be overlooked by many, it's a genuinely awesome game.



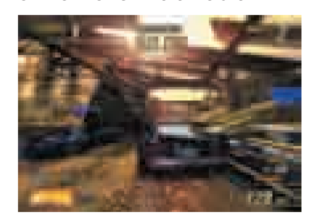
Psi-Ops: TMC
We're quite disappointed that Midway hasn't come up with a *Psi-Ops* sequel yet – the original is really good.



games™ VIEWPOINT


BURNOUT REVENGE

You could have seen it coming – boxed copies of Criterion's latest racer land in the office and the place goes mental, right up to the point that the fighting breaks out. Thankfully, we've all got one now so anyone who fancies trying us online knows where we are.



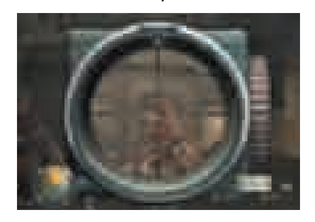
FAR CRY INSTINCTS

We have to admit, we had doubts about the majesty of *Far Cry* being brought to a humble console, especially when the PS2 version was canned for looking rubbish. Thankfully, the Xbox has at least held its own; it's far from perfect, but it's not half bad either.



SNIPER ELITE

Is it wrong to enjoy shooting people from 100 yards away, taking them down before they even know we're coming? In the real world, sure… but that's why we enjoy *Sniper Elite* all the more. It's been a long time coming, but the wait's certainly been worth it.



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



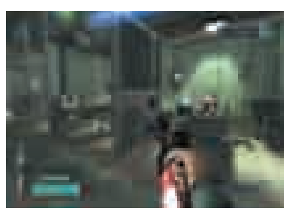
CASTLEVANIA: DAWN OF SORROW

Sometimes, trying to be innovative isn't a good idea. In the case of *Dawn Of Sorrow*, that would apply to Konami's use of the DS – it's all too gimmicky and not fun. That said, the game itself is excellent… so that's okay then.



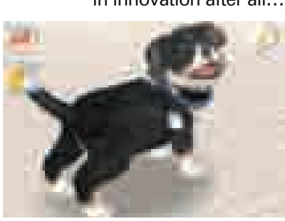
GEIST

It's a shame… *Geist* could have been so good. Instead, some horrible linearity has left us with a game that, while interesting, is average at best. Call us old-fashioned, but we like our games to have a bit of gameplay… is that really too much to ask?



NINTENDOGS

While we can certainly appreciate what it is that *Nintendogs* achieves, we have to admit that we'd never have predicted it becoming such a phenomenon – the game's just flying off the shelves. Guess there's something in innovation after all…





GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo
UK Launch Date 3 May 2002
Media 3-inch Optical Disc
Current Price £79.99

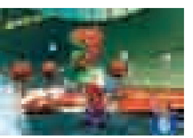
Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option if you love videogames.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

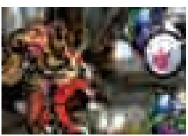
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Alien Hominid IMPORT	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth	Hardcore 2D blasting with a sense of humour
Chibi-Robo IMPORT	Nintendo	Skip	Charming miniature robot fun – simple but effective
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	Sega does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume	Highly absorbing – the *Animal Crossing* of farming games
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Killer7	Capcom	In-House	As arty as it is challenging – truly weird and wonderful
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	A grower, by all accounts – take your time and enjoy
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House	Another great 3D outing for our favourite female bounty hunter
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems	Hugely entertaining and challenging at the same time
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House	More flowery fun for those of a patient disposition
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House	Reinvention on a scale that brings the series back to life
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not perfect, but still a very fine *Mario* adventure
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House	An absolute beast of an RPG that will dominate your life
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	In-House	A fine return for our favourite side-scrolling superhero
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	Far better than its clueless detractors will have you believe

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Super Mario Sunshine
■ Nothing like a good *Mario* game to get the juices flowing – *Sunshine* might not be the best, but we love it regardless.



Viewtiful Joe 2
■ We can't decide why Capcom's superhero outing doesn't sell well; it's a real barnstormer of a game.



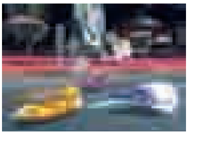
Pikmin 2
■ More green-fingered goodness with Miyamoto's flowery friends… it's a 'grow your own adventure'.



Soul Calibur II
■ Truth be told, the third game isn't much different from this sequel, so GameCube owners aren't missing out.



F-Zero GX
■ The game that broke our beloved HD plasma screen – we're too scared to try it again now we've had it fixed.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



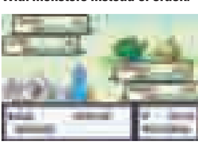
Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games can be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours, while the even more diminutive Micro is also out to buy now.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

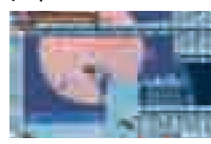
Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Pokémon Emerald
Damn it, if we haven't got to catch them all again – it's like some kind of addiction, only with monsters instead of crack.



Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow
Too cheap to invest in a DS? Don't worry – there's still a great *Castlevania* game waiting to suck your precious lifeblood…



Mario Vs Donkey Kong
Something a bit different from the rotund plumber; a puzzle adventure with more cunning than a big box of cunning things.



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



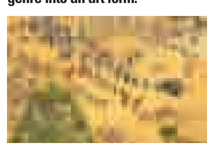
While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics and other special effects.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

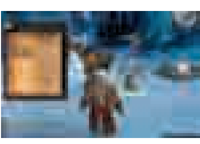
Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Digital Illusions
City Of Heroes	NCsoft	Cryptic Studios
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2005	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
GTR – FIA GT Racing Game	Atari	SimBin Development
Guild Wars	NCSoft	ArenaNet
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	NovaLogic	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games
World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Blizzard

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

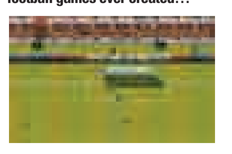
Rise Of Nations
Solid strategy goodness with a hint of evolution; Microsoft certainly knows how to turn a genre into an art form.



World Of Warcraft
Don't complain… those monthly charges seem tiny when you consider how much fun there is to find in *WOW*.



Sensible World Of Soccer
***FIFA*? *Pro Evo*? Pah. They can bow before the might of what still stands as one of the greatest football games ever created…**





NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™

XBOX 360 LAUNCH SPECIAL

NEXT MONTH

180
HIGH DEFINITION PAGES

The sexy, swirly and stylish future is here. Microsoft's second coming looks to be a visually splendid introduction to the next generation and we'll have the lowdown on the system's launch titles next issue, including Bizarre Creations' beautiful fuel-guzzling update Project Gotham Racing 3. Vroom indeed.

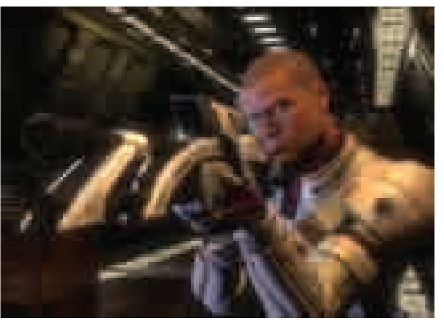


Thank you, Mr Ueda – you've managed to make our empty lives very, very happy indeed. Yay.

MORE… REVIEWS

You want far too many games? Hey, you've got it. From next-gen hotness on the Xbox 360, and the pinnacle of this generation – Shadow Of The Colossus, Soul Calibur III, Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones and more besides – to handheld fun with Pursuit Force, Gunstar Super Heroes and Trauma Center, you won't be able to move for reviews. Possibly.

"AS BEAUTIFUL AS IT IS SUBLIME, YOU CAN'T HELP BUT LOVE COLOSSUS"

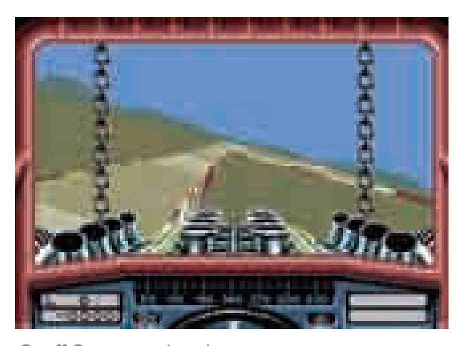


BioWare goodness on the Xbox 360? Why, things just keep getting better and better for us…

MORE… PREVIEWS

The busy holiday period might be winding up, but rest assured that we'll be rooting out the biggest games from 2006's rapidly filling catalogue. We're already jetting off around the globe to make sure Forbidden Siren 2, Supreme Commander, Mass Effect, Heroes Of Might And Magic V and an assortment of other delights will be laid bare for your reading pleasure.

"MASS EFFECT LOOKS SET TO BRING BIOWARE'S MAGIC TO THE NEXT GEN…"



Geoff Crammond – a hero to many retro gamers, and he'll be right here in next month's Retro.

MORE… FEATURES

As if it wasn't cold enough over here, games™ is heading to Russia to see Nival Interactive, the developer entrusted with the future of the Might And Magic series. We'll also be taking a look at how global territories shape our understanding of videogames, while Retro talks exclusively to Geoff Crammond, the elusive chap behind Sentinel and Stunt Car Racer. Lovely.

ON SALE 1 DEC 05

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think – now you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not…

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peters Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum?

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.gamestm.co.uk**
You will arrive at the **games™** website. Nice, isn't it? Click on the 'forum' icon near the top of the page. If you're a first-time visitor to the forum you'll have to register before you can post. Just click 'register', fill in a few details (such as a username and password) and you're away.

Step Three:
Ha! There is no step three. It's that simple. Just choose which thread looks most interesting then post your deepest, darkest thoughts (preferably concerning gaming) in there. There's even a dedicated letters thread where you can post anything you'd like to see on these pages.

games™ reserves the right to edit letters for space and/or clarity. The views expressed in letters on these pages are those of the correspondents and not **games™**. If you want a healthy debate, we'll see you on the forum…

Matt Ingrey's letter (g™ 36) is misleadingly optimistic. True, EA gets the bad press as an evil corporate Pac-Man, eating the industry alive with 'FIFA 128' and making its employees work 26-hour days while their girlfriends bitch about the company online. Meanwhile Nintendo and Rare (well, before it got shit) are painted as the darlings of the true gamer, making happy purple titles for the hardcore because they're our friends who want to make cool games for us. Supposedly.

Okay, so he's right to say EA gets more than its fair share of bad rep, but the fact remains that the company's hardly on the breadline. EA is not struggling to survive! It wants to make as much money as possible! It's called capitalism! On the cusp of the new generation, games are more of a mass-market commodity than ever. And yet more complex consoles, bigger budgets, bigger teams, spiralling dev costs and a preponderance of *FIFA Street* titles to fund it all ARE a problem!

If it's only the giant corporations who can afford to develop next-gen titles, how is this good for the industry? There's always going to be rubbish in the charts as well as innovative stuff and without the shit you wouldn't get all the good stuff, but the ratio of corporate greed to innovation is appalling. Costs and cookie-cutter sequels vs originality IS a topical issue and Mr Ingrey ignores it at his peril. Otherwise we'll be paying £70 for 'FIFA 2011' on PlayStation4 and loading up *Secret Of Mana* on the last SNES ever in a candlelit room.
Harry Steinbeck

games™: And so the debate rages on. You'd be surprised how evenly split the sides are – half of you defending EA to the hilt, the other half ripping into it for everything that's wrong with the industry today. Call us Devil's Advocate, but we're more than happy to sit on the fence… some of EA's games might be terrible atrocities that don't deserve to exist, but there's no denying all the good it does for the industry as well. Here's hoping we haven't accidentally started World War III here…

As a huge anime fan, I must say I don't like all these substandard *Marvel* licences plaguing consoles these days. For every quite-good-apparently *Spider-Man* title, there's a host of Western comic cash-ins. In my opinion, Japanese cartoons kick arse… and then some. Some of the games based on them aren't bad either, for instance, *Naruto 3* on GameCube is a fun, varied title (as long as it's played while reading an English guide to what you have to do). Granted, it's not the best fighter ever, but I bet it will own some over most forthcoming 'X-Men Resurrection Legends Super Again' crap. Will it ever come out here? No. Will *Jump Superstars* make it to our shores in a special limited edition DS bundle? Will it hell. *Bleach* on the PSP? Forget it. It's a vicious circle. Gamers aren't familiar with the characters, so games don't get released, so there's no game-based marketing for anime, so you can't watch any anime in the UK, so gamers don't know what *Naruto* is, and so forth. Aaah! You can't have one without the other, so we're stuck making *Spider-Man* flap about some more. Maybe they should teach Japanese in schools instead of this General Studies rubbish. Orochimaru would school Spider-Man any day.
Jessica Harper

"THE RATIO OF **CORPORATE GREED TO INNOVATION** IS **APPALLING**. WE'LL SOON BE PAYING **£70 FOR 'FIFA 2011'** ON PLAYSTATION4 AND LOADING UP SECRET OF MANA ON THE **LAST SNES EVER** IN A CANDLELIT ROOM"



SMS TEXT

We've got an exclusive SMS text service sponsored by Orange. Simply text us your question or comment on

07970 043498



The games™ SMS texting service is brought to you courtesy of Orange. For more information on Orange's range of wirefree™ games log on to: www.orange.co.uk/multimedia



Electronic Arts – a publisher of videogames based in the United States, not the devil bound in human flesh as some of you believe.

games™: You've got a fair point there – after all, we've had more fun than we care to mention with a number of anime-based games that'll never see the light of day outside Japan (although we tend to keep quiet when asked about our affinity for *Kinnikuman Generations*), while other Western-based titles have turned out to be substandard. But then, it's understandable why publishers don't go out of their way to import the rights to such titles… why spend money publishing a game that's never going to do well enough to make a profit? It's just a shame that the same attitude spreads across almost every facet of the entire industry…

As an English teacher of more years than I care to admit, I've spent countless hours correcting the spelling and grammar of hordes of children. As journalists, I'm sure you don't need me to tell you the importance of correct English usage for clarity and professional appearance. However, even correctly written material can't tell us the correct pronunciation of game titles and characters! From inconsequential debates over the name Tifa (Tee-fa? Tiff-a?), to stop embarrassment over the pronunciation of *Disgaea* or *Ninja Gaiden* (Gay-den? Guy-dun?), it's often strange to say words out loud that you've only ever read before. Is it just me, or does anyone else find this curious? People in the industry must hear company representatives saying these names, so maybe phonetic guides could be included for the more troublesome proper nouns? Just a thought…
Timothy Hartte



There's a lot to be said for games based on Japanese manga, although a lack of knowledge prevents their release over here.

games™: We'd suggest not even opening up that particular can of worms. Honestly, the number of arguments we've had with various beat-'em-up-obsessed friends over the correct way to say Ryu (Rye-you? Ree-you? Ruu?) and Zangief (Zan-geef? Zan-jeff?)… just thinking about them is almost enough to bring the bruising back.

Having played games for 25 years now, I just can't help but chuckle at some of the endless complaints of today's gamers. "My game's too hard. I can't get past this boss. I can't wait for the next-generation consoles. I don't get enough time to play every title I've bought. Nothing happens in the summer." These complaints are pretty commonplace but, really, they all cancel each other out. Play the stuff that you bought ages ago, when there are no decent new releases. What's with this desperate rush to get to the end of games? Back in my youth, you had to start many titles from scratch whenever you turned them on (*Sonic*'s level select notwithstanding). My kids were absolutely



CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Text Life

What's the score with *Perfect Dark Zero*? I heard it was due for release after launch, but when? I need it now!
gTM: Don't worry… it's supposed to be an Xbox 360 launch title, according to Microsoft. With the emphasis on 'supposed to be', of course.

The PSP is twice the price of a PS2, and that's not good enough.
gTM: Ah, but it's half the size – surely that makes up for it?

Why on earth is Nintendo making a remote control? In appealing to the masses, surely it's forgetting us hardened gamers.
gTM: Oh, shush. If you haven't got the vision to see what the Revolution controller is capable of, you're no friend of ours.

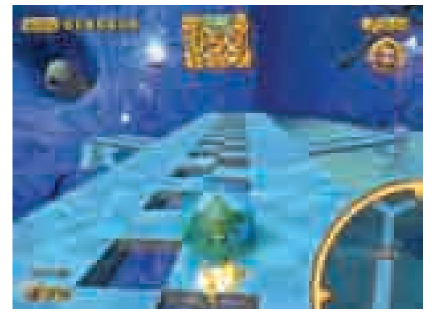
What would the **games™** team be doing right now if games were never invented?
gTM: Six words: "Would you like fries with that?"

I hope Square don't let down *FFVII* with new games and a movie – if they ruin the franchise, I'll never forgive them.
gTM: You, and a million other dedicated fans of the series, no doubt.

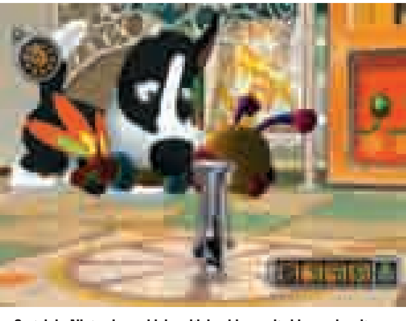
Multiplayer's cool but its about time we saw some eight-player split screen. Do you agree?
gTM: Got a big enough television then, have you?

Which graffiti-em'-up is better: *Jet Set Radio* or *Marc Ecko's Getting Up*?
gTM: No disrespect to Mr Ecko, but we'd side with *Jet Set Radio* – it just seems to handle the subject matter with more fun, rather than po-faced seriousness.

The PS3 will own the next-gen market! What do you think of my theory?
gTM: Much like the concept of Girls Aloud's talent: initially attractive, but ultimately nothing but hot air.



Super Monkey Ball – a damn hard game that'll have even hardcore gamers in tears. How non-gamers cope, we'll never know…



Certainly, Nintendo could do with bucking up its ideas when it comes to bringing its games out in the PAL market.

baffled by the lack of a save function in *Super Monkey Ball*. Bless 'em.

As a teenager I hardly completed anything, but that wasn't the point. Is the rush to complete things a marketing tool, designed to get gamers to press on through titles and then buy another one? Or is it just human psychology, always looking forward to an exciting future that never quite arrives? I personally can't wait to finish all my games and never play them again. I can't understand the idea that games should be made shorter so that they're more inclusive to novice gamers (*Another Code*). So what if not everyone can finish it?

Fair enough, having to repeat the same part of a game can become particularly frustrating, but surely a fair defeat at the end of an epic boss fight is better than a boring win? Isn't it the taking part that counts anyway? If you keep losing, play something else! *Ninja Gaiden Black*, sequel to the infamously difficult Xbox title, is set to have an optional easier mode that kicks in if you repeatedly fail early on. Choosing this option will inflict your character with a pink wristband for the game's remainder. I find this hilarious.

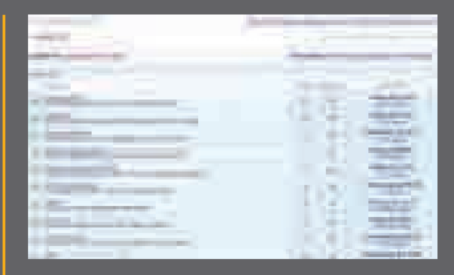
Kids today… they don't know they're born.
Joe Stanhope

games™: Ah, but you're forgetting… gaming's a casual activity too, now, isn't it? You can't possibly expect all those people with busy lives and the desire to go outside beyond the safety of their living room every once in a while to dedicate their time toward earning 1337ness. And besides, if everyone was as good at games as you needed to be back in the good old days, people like us wouldn't have anyone to beat, would we?

Is it just me, or does anyone else also think that the Xbox 360 stands a good chance of dying before the other next-generation platforms even arrive? Sure, it's guaranteed to sell out at launch, with Microsoft proudly citing some cleverly manipulated statistics about it being the most successful hardware launch of all time. High street retailers will bear adverts saying it's, "The most powerful console available." It'll probably have a good Christmas, with early adopters snapping it up and buying some exclusives along with prettied-up renditions of multiformat big hitters.

But which home console will be the biggest seller of Christmas 2005? Ignoring the possibility of supply and demand cock-ups like last year, the PlayStation2 is likely to sell the most, and probably deservingly so. Most of my most-wanted forthcoming titles are for the machine (*Shadow Of The Colossus, Guitar Hero, Okami*). I don't want to be a doom-harbinger, and I'm all for multi-console





FROM THE FORUM

GAMEFAQS – HEAVEN SENT SAINT OR ORIGINAL SINNER?

ownership and everyone getting along smashingly but could the 360 go the same way as the Dreamcast? Arriving first and not quite managing to compete against five-year-old technology?
Andy Millton

games™: Certainly, Microsoft's push to bring on the next generation of hardware before the current one is dead is somewhat brave… but then, it's hardly new if you look back at the company's other practices. Still, you just have to wonder, with the machine coming out so close to Christmas, how much of an impact it's going to make – faced with a 360 sell-out, will parents resort to buying whatever's available like a PS2? It'll certainly make for an interesting holiday, whatever happens…

So, Nintendo wants to bring the non-gamer, the people who don't normally play games and will get sucked in by cutsey virtual dogs, into the fold does it? Its new controller could (possibly) be applauded for extending gaming's reach to people for who holding a conventional controller isn't an option. But what would be really revolutionary (ho ho) would be for Nintendo to include an often-maligned part of the demographic, for its policy of all-inclusiveness to stretch beyond the women and pensioners, all the way to…the PAL gamer!

For Nintendo to succeed survive or even thrive in the next generation it really needs to stop the delays, the poor conversions and the price discrepancies. The UK market has been neglected for far too long when it comes to Nintendo's titles, especially on its main consoles – many GameCube games take over three or four months to make it onto our shores (and, in some cases, even longer; don't get me started on *Animal Crossing*…). Also, for a company as reliant on handhelds as home consoles for its hardware revenue, the DS in particular needs to shine. Every generation of home console sees Nintendo struggling more against its rivals, but this time around, the monopoly on the portable market is gone. The Nintendo DS seems to be doing well in the UK. It's easily available in the high street, with big displays and window advertising even in smaller stores (albeit at the expense of GameCube shelf space). It's even region free. So why are we waiting longer than the rest of the world for *Meteos* and *Lost In Blue*? Where are the games that will really allow the handheld to prove what it can do over and above Sony's high-tech gadget?
Cedric Hugo

games™: We're glad you said all that – we were starting to wonder when anyone would notice. Undoubtedly, Nintendo's biggest weakness seems to be an inability to release games in Europe on a reasonable schedule; it's nowhere near as bad as it used to be, but the publisher seems intent on giving us Brits a lesson in patients when it comes to quality games. Case in point – as we go to press, we've just received the Japanese version of Super Princess Peach, a great little old-school platformer from Nintendo for the DS. That it doesn't even have a rough UK release date in 2006, let alone an exact one, is another sign that we're being neglected as gamers. But then, that's why many of us import in the first place…

"HAVING TO REPEAT THE SAME PART OF A GAME CAN BE **FRUSTRATING** BUT SURELY **A FAIR DEFEAT** AT THE END OF AN **EPIC BOSS FIGHT** IS MUCH BETTER THAN A BORING WIN? KIDS TODAY… THEY **DON'T KNOW THEY'RE BORN**"

Captain Commando
I've noticed there's a lot of hostility towards using guides for games amongst 'hardcore' gamers recently, and I was just wondering what you guys think about using guides for games? For me personally I'd have to say GameFAQs is a saint. Before people jump up and down and throwing things at me, I'm strictly talking about the guides. In my opinion, guides only spoil games if you use them while you play a game for the first time, as it takes away from the challenge of playing the game in the first place. However, once I complete a game, often I will visit GameFAQs to discover that anywhere between 10-50 per cent of the game had completely passed me by on my first playthrough.

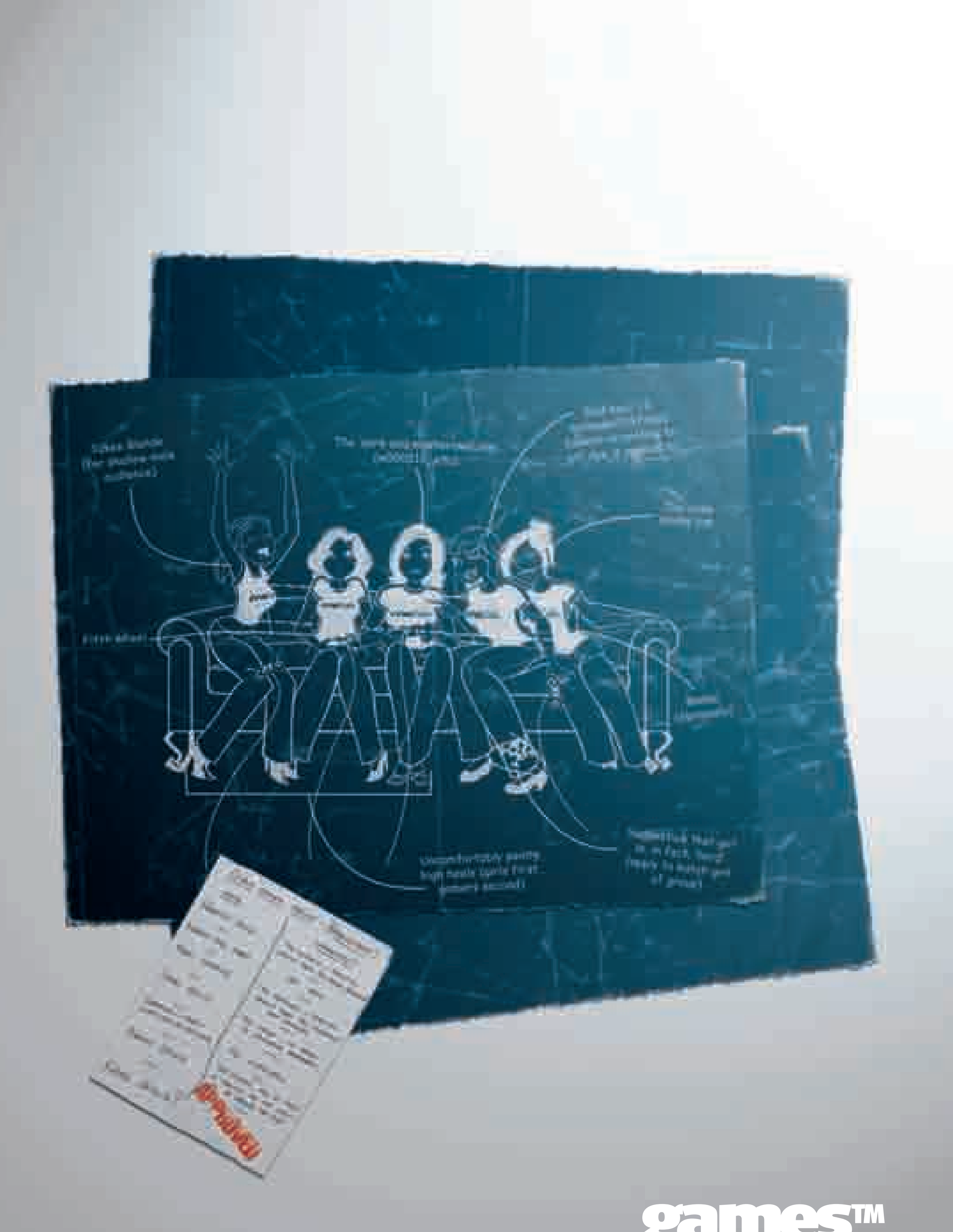
Hong Kong Phooey
I'm a huge fan of their guides, although that's not saying that I use them all the time. If I've been stuck on a particular section of a game for an hour or so, it's great just to have a quick look at a guide and away you go. If I didn't use them occasionally, I'd probably have thrown a few games out my bedroom window by now.

Ben
I don't mind admitting I've used them before, although on occasion it's been a bit of a last resort. Recently I've mostly been using them almost as a translation guide; finding out what the missions are on *Naruto*, or helping me through the *Saturn Grandia* and the two un-translated *Shining Force 3* chapters. Saint, I say. If you cheat and ruin the game, it's your own fault, really.

Jusatsushi
There's absolutely no way on earth I would have bred a gold Chocobo on *FFVII* without some sort of guide, so for that reason alone GameFAQs is bookmarked. Spoiler free walkthroughs can be useful at times toom, but I can't stand full walkthroughs that tell you exactly where to go and what to do for a game's entirety. Why the hell would anyone play a game like that? That would just kill any sense of pacing and exploration.

MattyD
I agree with the Captain: I think GameFAQs is great for finding all the stuff you missed on the first playthrough. I'm an avid collectable, er, collector – a regular magpie for hidden packages and the like – but there's always one or two I can never find and then it's invaluable.

Windy
It's a saint in most cases but it can be too tempting at times to just sneak a peek. It's also excellent for finding out release dates as well, or if a game came out only in Japan, US, PAL or whatever; GameFAQs is full of game info so I'd be a liar if I said I didn't use it on the odd occasion.


games™